

NUNC COGNOSCO EX PARTE




TRENT UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

PRESENTED BY

Mrs. H. H. Graham

ms 14 H Graham



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2019 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

<https://archive.org/details/principlesofengl0000aber>

Principles of English Prosody

Part I

By the same Author

Towards a Theory of Art

The Epic : An Essay

Speculative Dialogues

Four Short Plays

Thomas Hardy : A Critical Study

Phoenix

Principles of English Prosody

By Lascelles Abercrombie

Part I
The Elements

London : Martin Secker
Number Five John Street
Adelphi m c m x x i i i

PE 1505 .A2 v.1

23-11653

LONDON : MARTIN SECKER (LTD.) 1923

PREFACE

It will be seen from the title-page that this volume professes no more than to introduce its subject. It seemed convenient to present a general study of English prosody in two parts : the first would be an attempt to settle the elementary nature of metre ; the second would, in an account of the chief English forms of metre, describe how that nature works itself out in practice.

The First Part was finished a good while ago ; but the second requires, I find, much more time than I had expected or can at present afford. It occurred to me, however, that the first part might stand by itself, and would, if it succeeded in its intentions, give many readers all they want. But, of course, the test of its adequacy will come in the second or descriptive part. The two parts together will, I hope, make up a text-book of English metrical practice which will be useful to students and not too burdensome for those whose interest in poetic technique is an avocation rather than

Principles of English Prosody

a vocation. The Second Part is so far planned that I have been able to refer forward to the numbers of its sections.

The book, when completed, will not be a history of English prosody, nor a criticism of metrical styles. It will be an outline (and in my opinion only an outline is needed) of the way in which English rhythms have been made serviceable to poetic art. Nor will it attempt to find the psychological, physiological or physical origins of metre ; since these have no more to do with the art of poetry than the psychology, physiology and physics of violin-playing have to do with the art of music. The notion that artistic theory requires these interesting investigations is like expecting a man to describe a railway journey by telling you how the railway is financed, what topographical and economical reasons governed its route, and how the thermodynamics of the engine may be drawn in a graph.

It will be seen, however, that the book assumes some positions of æsthetic theory. They will be found to be in accordance with those advocated in "An Essay towards a Theory of Art," which was lately published ;

Preface

and to the arguments there outlined I must refer those readers who are dissatisfied with what may seem mere dogmatism here. That essay, I hope, will be followed before long by a more detailed discussion of the theory of poetry, which will describe the province of poetic technique and the methods appropriate to it. Of most of those methods, anything like a systematic grammar is either not required or impossible ; but of one—prosody—a grammar is both possible and required. This special discussion, however, could not be included in a theory of the art of poetry as a whole without distortion of the general argument, but nevertheless should have that argument behind it. Its present appearance is thus, logically, premature ; and if its preliminaries now seem too abrupt, I hope it will be supposed that, when the work I have in mind is completed, they will be found to give sufficient linkage with the main body of the theory.

The authority throughout has been the practice of the poets. Their theories have not, as a rule, helped me very far. There is one notable exception. Robert Bridges, whose metrical instinct is unerring in his art, has, in his treatise on “Milton’s Prosody,” given

Principles of English Prosody

to the theory of English metre a lucidity, a precision, and an exact dependance on fact, from which no subsequent discussion can, without obscurantism, fail to derive. If I only acknowledge my debt to Dr. Bridges in general terms, it is because no other acknowledgment of a debt so pervading is possible. I was sometimes tempted to justify my divergences from so formidable an authority ; but the nature of my argument precluded anything but a casual glance at opinions with which I cannot agree. I wisht to give a plain and reasoned account of English metres as they actually occur ; history and criticism of English metrical theory are quite another matter. Had I not decided against alluding to other theorists, the names to which, after Dr. Bridges, I should have most frequently referred would, no doubt, have been those of Mr. Omond, Dr. Saintsbury and Professor Schipper.

It would have been tempting also to show how the views I advocate would account for German and Italian versification as well as for English. It seems to me, for example, that the difficulties which theorists have made about Milton's blank verse are precisely those which other theorists have made about Dante's

Preface

terza rima ; and that the same way of understanding metrical rhythm will relegate either to the History of Spectres—the history of the mistakes that have no importance. But this, too, was a temptation I was bound at present to resist.

L. A.

Principles of English Prosody

PART I

THE ELEMENTS

§ 1. (1) It is not necessary, in an account of Prosody, to discuss the nature of Poetry ; nor to describe at large the art by which that nature is realized. But it will be convenient to indicate, by a series of short propositions (which must be assumed here as self-evident), the part taken by prosody in successful poetic art.

(2) Poetry is the expression of an experience (however originated) which has acquired the nature of an urgent imaginative inspiration, or impulse towards complete expression.

(3) The Art of Poetry is divisible into :

(i) *Conception* or Internal Expression : the private expression of the inspiration in the poet's

Principles of English Prosody

own mind, by the completion of the imaginative process into a stable, isolated and self-contained whole (which may be referred to as the Image).

“ Conception ” here has nothing to do with concepts, but is, on the contrary, a peculiarly secure and vivid intuition. The Image, of course, must not be limited to visual imagery, but is any establisht act of imagination in which the elements of an experience are completely integrated and thereby conjointly isolated into a unity of their own.

(ii) *Technique* or External Expression : the publication of the Image in language.

Language is the medium of poetry in the sense that it is the means of publishing the Image. Any other means of external expression—e.g. histrionic—falls outside the Art of Poetry.

The Art of Poetry does not occur until both these portions of it have been completed.

(4) The Image is not itself communicable, since it does not and cannot exist in words, but is a formalized experience. External expression in language cannot therefore be other than symbolic : this applies to every aspect of poetic expression in language. Technique has to provide an *imitation*

in words of the Image ; it cannot give the Image direct (as, e.g., reasoning can be given in language, since it can exist in language).

Hence when metre, e.g., is said to be “ expressive,” this will be understood to mean “ symbolically expressive.” It may be asked, How does such a symbolism arise ? and it must suffice here to answer, Empirically : it has been found to work. But, of course, this is not merely a pragmatic sanction of the haphazard. It is a general law of Art, that the effective is also the expressive. If, for example, metre can effect certain feelings in the mind, then metre will be the expression of those feelings, since by its means the poet who experiences them can provoke them in his hearers : and to do that *is* his expression on the external side.

This is why poetic technique shows such great complexity, uniting in the management of its medium so many different kinds of expression : it is in order to achieve an all-round inclusive symbolism of that which cannot be directly given.

As the whole use of language in poetry belongs to Technique, so everything in Technique belongs to the purpose of expression (i.e. publication).

(5) There is no hard and fast distinction between Poetry and Prose. What we call poetry is that kind

Principles of English Prosody

of verbal expression which uses every appropriate resource available in language. Thus poetry differs from prose only in the degree of its imitation, poetry being the more complete.

Suppose part of the experience were thought. Poetic technique would have to give not merely *the thought* but *the experience of thinking it*.

§ 2. Technique has two main functions, corresponding to two capital aspects of the Image :

(i) The Image has its *Unity*, due to the peculiar self-contained harmony of its elements. Technique imitates this by the *Form* of the poem.

(ii) The Image has its *Matter*, the peculiar quality and substance of its elements. Technique imitates this by the *Diction* of the poem.

§ 3. *Place of Rhythm in Technique.*

(1) Language itself has two aspects, Semantic and Phonetic.

The distinction is familiar, and has required no justification since Dante's proof that men "ad communicandum inter se conceptiones" can only employ "aliquod *rationale signum et sensuale*." But Dante's words might be carelessly read to suggest that language as *signum sensuale* carries a

message—*signum rationale*—which is then detached by the receiving mind and understood. Such a suggestion sometimes underlies the discussion of Semantic and Phonetic. It could only be true if language were the ideally logical instrument desired by George Boole (*Laws of Thought*, Ch. XI, § 15) and others. But language is primarily an æsthetic instrument, and can only be so considered here. And as an æsthetic instrument, language is not sound to which meaning can be assigned, but sound which *is* meaning. Except by the absurd error of regarding words as composed of letters, or the error not less absurd of regarding them as animal noises, the meaning of language must be sound, and the sound of language must be meaning, in order to be discussed at all. But it is equally true that, if there is to be any nicety or precision of discussion, the meaning of the sound and the sound of the meaning must be distinguished : language must be taken in its semantic and in its phonetic *aspect*. This is especially required in the theory of poetry. Just as the semantic aspect there must be notably more than the meaning which can be isolated from context, so the phonetic aspect of language in poetry is not only of words but of combinations of words. Poetry being that usage of language which includes every available quality, we have to consider the means by which a distinct expressiveness—not semantic, and not given in word-by-word phonetic, but enveloping these—may be organized out of the continuity of linguistic sound : how, that is to say, a mass of words can be made

Principles of English Prosody

to *mean more* as a whole than the sum of its individual contributions by virtue of its *rhythm*.

(2) The Form of a poem results from, or is the effect of, the orderly accumulation in the memory of a series of expressions, and its integration there when it is complete. Thus poetic form does not belong to the linear process of verbal expression, but is the total effect of this.

(3) Form as the total effect of the Semantic aspect of language will be called Intellectual Form ; as the total effect of the Phonetic aspect it will be called Instrumental Form. (See § 5.)

(4) Apart from Form (but of course always conducing to it), everything occurring in the process of verbal expression is included in Diction, which will therefore give, for purposes of discussion :

(i) Expression as Semantic—the meaning of words (*signum rationale*) ;

(ii) Expression as Phonetic—the sound of words (*signum sensuale*).

And this last, the *sound* of expression in language, may itself be subdivided as :

(i) *Syllabic* : the quality of vowels and consonants and of their combinations and successions (i.e. quality of their combinations without regard to duration and force, of their successions without regard to numeration).

(ii) *Rhythmic* : the recognizable order of alternative degrees in certain variable characters of vocalization. These variables which are capable of entering into rhythm are of three kinds :

(a) Quantity : duration of syllables.*

(b) Stress : force of breath-impulse initiating syllables.†

* So usually. But it would be better, psychologically, to refer quantity to effort, or rather, *extent of effort*. For that, no doubt, is what is mainly felt by the speaker, and what the hearer sympathizes with.

† Jespersen points out—and he is clearly right—that in stress a momentary access of energy is given not only to the lungs, but to the whole vocal apparatus. Psychologically, the reference should again be to effort ; but now to *degree of effort*. It is plain that an access of effort need not mean an extended effort : the confusion of quantity with stress, so common in prosody, is difficult to understand. There is this further difference. It is true the stress of a word is as much a part of its phonetic nature as the other qualities of its sound ; but nevertheless it is

Principles of English Prosody

(c) Pitch : tone of syllables in the musical scale.

(5) It is at least questionable whether any one of these three is by itself capable of giving rhythm ; but it is probable that in the last analysis rhythm will always be found to be decided by stress, however substantiated or qualified by the other variables. No doubt all three variables occur together in any rhythm of language, but they need not, therefore, be all active in establishing or schematizing the rhythm. Pitch is certainly never felt as the basis of a rhythmic structure ; if two speakers agreed in their varying of stress in a phrase, but disagreed in their varying of pitch, they would be held to agree in rhythm. But for the most part pitch depends on stress, and stress as a rule does not alter without affecting pitch : though it may be immaterial to the “ shape ” of the rhythm how the pitch is affected.




a quality added to, or at least separable from, the other qualities. Whereas quantity is not separable from the other qualities ; it is the condition under which they exist—i.e. can be vocalized. For convenience of discussion, both quantity and stress will be taken in their conventional explanations.

The combined effect of pitch and stress on the utterance of a syllable is called its Accent ; and a rhythm given by this may be called either an Accentual Rhythm or a Stress-Rhythm. " Stress-Rhythm " certainly refers to the decisive element ; but " Accentual Rhythm " is perhaps preferable, since pitch will also be involved. It may be convenient to keep the word " pitch " for variations in tone between syllable and syllable within the same word, or for variations between one word and another ; but the undulation of tone over a whole sentence may be called " intonation." Marked differences of intonation, while they may not alter the scheme of the rhythm, may yet noticeably alter its quality.

It seems usual in English for increase of stress to heighten the pitch. Thus in proceeding from stress to unstress the pitch *falls* (e.g. " pity ") ; from unstress to stress the pitch *rises* (e.g. " avail "). " Pity " is therefore said to have a *falling accent*, " avail " a *rising accent* ; and sequences of syllables so alternating to be *falling* or *rising* rhythms. Since these terms really refer to the pitch, it is inaccurate to speak of " falling stress-rhythm," but quite accurate to speak of " falling accentual rhythm."

Principles of English Prosody

(6) The natural English rhythms are accentual. Quantity is present, but not regularly ; and its effect is seldom noted in rhythm, and perhaps not consciously heard, except as an exaggeration of accent. For if quantity enters at all into the rhythms natural to English, it only does so subordinate to, and in a manner prescribed by, accent. This, of course, is not to identify quantity with accent ; but a quantitative pattern running counter to an accentual rhythm would in English not be heard, without special and studious cultivation of a sense for quantity.

There is, at any rate, in ordinary hearing of English no suggestion of an established quantitative relationship like $\frac{\text{"Long"}}{2} = \text{"Short,"}$ still less of anything like a cyclic dactyl, where  or  =  ; and without something of the kind no pattern in quantity is possible. Utterance and hearing might be educated up to this.

Thus English rhythms may properly be regarded as accentual in scheme ; quantity being employed not schematically, but occasionally, following the

requirements of accent. If, for example, a monosyllable occurs as the equivalent of a disyllable, its prominence is decided by its accent, but its equivalence will probably be assisted by its length or by an easily imposed lengthening. But quantity is commonly used in English versification not rhythmically at all, but as a syllabic quality, like alliteration and assonance ; and its effect is frequently inextricable from the effect of, for example, sequences of vowels or consonants. Thus in the line

In Cedar, Marble, *Ivory* or Gold

the rhythm is given by the four accents on the italicized vowel sounds, and the rhythmic character requires no assistance from the quantity of these vowels ; the first of them, for example, being of the same quantity as the unaccented syllables which precede and follow it. But apart from the rhythm which the accented vowels establish, the mere syllabic quality of their sequence is conspicuous, and the quantity—"length"—of each vowel is heard only as a feature of their syllabic quality—of their *nature* as "front" or "back," "tense" or

Principles of English Prosody

“ slack,” “ rounded ” or “ unrounded ” vowels, but not as a feature of their place in a rhythmic scheme ; and average hearing probably no more notices their quantity in the general phonetic effect than it notices such qualities as analysis labels “ front,” “ tense ” and the rest. Prosody is not concerned with syllabic qualities except as they specifically enter into rhythmic schematism ; and with this very occasional exception, quantity does not therefore belong to the prosody of natural English rhythms.

(7) In quantitative rhythms, however, as in Latin and Greek verse, and in English verse composed on their principles (generally called Classical), quantity and accent are both distinctly heard, separately contributing to the rhythmic structure ; the apparent rhythmic independence of quantity being the feature distinguishing such verse from accentual verse. Thus accent is as effective on a short syllable as on a long, requiring no quantitative emphasis ; a short syllable requires no lengthening in order to bear an accent. A long syllable is as decisive to the quantitative pattern in an unaccented as in an accented position, requiring no accentual

emphasis. A quantitative pattern can therefore maintain itself either in contrast or in coincidence with an accentual rhythm. The scheme of such rhythms is in fact usually held to be given by the quantities, accentual departures from the scheme being in accordance with the normal requirements of metre, which will be described later (§§ 6, 8, 9 and 10). It may be doubted, however, whether it is true that the rhythmic scheme is entirely quantitative ; it seems likely that here, too, stress is the thing that really decides rhythm, that a quantitative pattern does not really become rhythmical until it is stressed. Thus, if we translate into sound the following sequence of dots and dashes

— — — — — — — —

it may be questioned whether there will be any rhythm unless the sequence can be accepted as

 — — — — — —

When, therefore, in a line of classical verse, there is combination without coincidence of quantitative pattern and accentual rhythm, the whole effect probably includes the “ understood ” stress-rhythm

Principles of English Prosody

of the quantitative scheme underneath the actually heard accentual rhythm ; the stress-rhythm being the more easily understood because its vehicle, the sequence of quantities, is also of course actually heard. But this belongs to metre, rather than to the more general question of rhythm. It was only desirable here to point out the nature of quantitative rhythms : for all the apparent independence of quantity and accent, quantitative rhythms are probably always quantitative stress-rhythms.

(8) The place of Rhythm in Technique, then, may be summarized thus : It is that part of the phonetic expression of language which is chiefly given by alternating stress ; phonetic expression being itself part of *Diction*, which is the verbal imitation of the *Substance* of an Image ; Rhythm, however, being also capable of summation into one aspect of poetic *Form*, which is the imitation of the *Unity* of an Image.

The study of rhythm bears the same relation to phonetic expression as the study of syntax does to semantic. They both exist in systematic continuity : whereas syllabic qualities of phonetic expression, like their correspondent

in semantic (i.e. the individual values of words), are neither systematic nor continuous. But the superior importance of rhythm and syntax does not come because their nature makes them fit for orderly exposition, but because it is by reason of their nature that poetic Form is possible. Rhythm is the formative part of phonetic as syntax is of semantic expression ; and the ability to exist formally is the crucial and the vital thing in poetry.

§ 4. (1) Neither the physical nature of rhythm, nor the psychological nature of the rhythmic sense, belongs to the study of prosody. We simply assume the fact of rhythm ; and take the selective appreciation of rhythm, the feeling for rhythmic propriety and in general the expressiveness of rhythm, to be empirically established, without enquiring what associations or compulsions may underlie a symbolism that seems so immediate.

(2) In any continuous sound which is not quite uniform, it is difficult not to hear some rhythm ; and it is as difficult for a human being not to make a noise rhythmically as not to hear it rhythmically.

The instance is familiar of a blacksmith dividing his hammer-strokes between the anvil and the

Principles of English Prosody

forging : if he does not *do* it rhythmically, we shall *hear* it rhythmically.

So with language. It is perhaps impossible to speak or write a sentence without rhythm ; someone would be sure to hear some rhythm in it. But it does not follow that it would be an expressive or appropriate rhythm ; certainly not that it would be the most expressive or the most appropriate rhythm.

(3) By Rhythmic Language will be meant language in which the rhythm is not only noticeable, but deliberate and designed as part of the expression. A sentence of such language would not have the same *whole meaning* if its rhythm were changed, whether the same words were used or not.

(4) In general, the characteristic effect of rhythm contributes something that could not be otherwise given ; and its contribution cannot therefore be exactly described. It may be used to bring certain words or phrases into prominence and endow them with unusual force ; it may be used to imitate natural sounds or suggest definite moods. These are obvious and, on the whole, exceptional. The

main scope of rhythmic expression may be indicated in this way.

Anything affirmed in the mind is accompanied by the emotion peculiar to its affirmation.* The mere fact, and the extent of the affirmation, may be expressed in the semantic effect of words, but this does not give the experience which has occurred. The expression of the fact must be accompanied, for complete expression of the actual experience, by expression of the emotion; and this is usually given by the rhythmical effect of the words used. It would suffice, for purposes of scientific expression, to give the fact; the purpose is no more than to elicit assent to the fact, which is either acceptable in itself or not. But the differentia of poetic expression is, that its concern with the thing

* It would be more accurate to say "accompanied by an intuition of the act (or process) of affirmation." There is the thing affirmed, and the experience of affirming it. The latter does not consist of "emotion"; the fact and its emotion are both intuited—and *that* is the experience. But the simplified statement given in the text is sufficiently accurate for the purpose here, and is perhaps more easily intelligible: it is certainly more manageable.

Principles of English Prosody

affirmed is no greater than its concern with the manner of the affirmation ; its purpose is to express a whole experience. And poetic expression therefore relies as much on rhythm as on semantic, in order to reproduce, along with the thing thought, the emotion of thinking it.

§ 5. *The Law of Rhythmic Continuity.*

(1) By Rhythm will henceforth be meant Rhythm designedly expressive.

Just as meaning not only progresses, but continually generates a larger meaning which includes its components in a whole sum of meaning, so it is a property of rhythm continually to generate larger and similarly inclusive rhythms. A sequence of words becomes the rhythm of a phrase, and phrase-rhythms become the rhythm of a sentence, to which the phrases contribute as the words do to the phrase. It is not merely a linear sequence, but an inclusive and orderly summation, or the integration of a series. Thus as phrases of rhythm become sentences, so sentences of rhythm become paragraphs, and paragraphs themselves become great rhythmic movements

including in their undulation the whole resultant of the successive phases of rhythm : movements which recognizably partake in, and are finally co-extensive with, the whole perfected poem.

This is, in fact, the instrumental form of the poem (§3 (3)). Now, just as rhythm proceeds, by successive inclusion and summation, to instrumental form, so syntax proceeds to intellectual form. Form, therefore, as the equivalent (in expression) of unity (in conception), is not imposed on diction, the expressive equivalent of the matter conceived ; form is the organic outcome of diction, whether semantic or phonetic.

Moreover, as rhythm is only given by pronouncing the words, it always proceeds alongside of syntax, the expressive contribution of rhythm continually accompanying the progressive meaning of the language. It follows, therefore, that instrumental form will always be simultaneous with intellectual form, and thus diction not only becomes form, but sound and meaning coincide in *one* form. And this is due to Rhythmic Continuity.

(2) A simple instance is a sonnet : the instru-

Principles of English Prosody

mental form is as unmistakable as the intellectual form. Fourteen isometrical lines are so grouped and bound together by the system of the rimes that a marked rhythmic paragraph of eight lines is followed by an equally marked paragraph of six lines ; and as the lines integrate their rhythms into the two paragraph-rhythms, so these two combine into the single inclusive rhythm of the whole poem : into its form on the instrumental side. Precisely simultaneous with this, the intellectual movement of the sense has progressed, until the two balanced modes of statement in octet and sextet coalesce in the single inclusive manner of the whole significance : which is the intellectual form. And the two aspects of formal presentation of the matter *are* the poem itself as a whole. The success of the sonnet must depend, of course, on whether this particular form is the right one for expressing the kind of unity its matter had as an imaginative experience.

The objection is sometimes made that form and matter are not really distinguishable. This is obviously untrue : anyone can distinguish them. It is certainly true that form and matter are " ultimately " the same thing ; but that thing

is neither the one nor the other, but the *poem itself*. Merge form and matter into each other, and neither exist : the poem exists. But as soon as you see the form of the poem as an aspect of it, you thereby see its matter as an opposed aspect : which seems a very elementary exercise of the intelligence. So long as you can see either form or matter, the two cannot be the same ; they can only be the same when you can see neither.

(3) The assertion of the law of Rhythmic Continuity given above may seem to call for some qualification. It has, indeed, been stated in its simplest form, in order to make the exposition of these preliminaries easily appreciated. There can be no difficulty about the whole rhythm of a stanza ; the single organic movement of a common quatrain, or of a stanza from Marvell's *Horatian Ode*, would so far present a perfect example of rhythmic continuity. But what is the instrumental form of the *Horatian Ode* itself, or of Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* ? Each stanza repeats a similar whole movement ; can such a long succession of discrete repetitions be accepted as a single form ? Can any long poem in stanzas, even in stanzas of such markedly unified

Principles of English Prosody

movement as Spenserians or ottava rima, really have a rhythmic form as a whole? The problem is similar in blank verse. Anyone can feel its large paragraphic rhythms; and such a poem as Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* doubtless has an appreciable unity of movement as a whole. But is this true of *Paradise Lost*? The only kinds of continuous verse capable of such grandeur of major rhythm as English blank verse, are terza rima and hexameters. But is there, again, really an instrumental form to be discerned in the *Divine Comedy* or the *Iliad*?

Note that in all these cases there is no doubt about the intellectual form. It can hardly be denied, that the limit beyond which instrumental form cannot be clearly perceived comes a good deal sooner than the limit beyond which intellectual form cannot be understood: both, of course, depending on the capacity of memory and the ability to integrate the succession of impressions. During a few stanzas, the slight varieties of stanza-rhythm easily combine into a continuous movement; just so a few paragraphs of blank verse are easily summed into an inclusive main undulation. But these major effects

of rhythm become gradually obscured, as the integrating ability of the rhythmic sense becomes exhausted. As soon, however, as the limit has been reached, the process begins over again. Now throughout all this, the intellectual form has been steadily and distinctly organizing its constant growth. Our experience therefore is, that instrumental form does accompany intellectual form as far as our capacity allows the former to be perceived; we are continually conscious of large rhythmic effects which *ought* to combine, if only we had the ability to integrate them, into a single form corresponding with the whole significance, just as the movement of a sonnet is heard as a whole as well as understood as a whole. The fact seems to be, that in a long poem the completion of the instrumental form, thus constantly heard in partial suggestion, is really taken over by the intellectual form: instrumental form becomes merged in intellectual form long before the poem is complete. The integration of the rhythm of the whole poem is, indeed, here a fiction; but a fiction for which the intellectual form seems to vouch, and which we have no difficulty

Principles of English Prosody

in accepting because throughout we have constantly and really perceived it *in process* of substantiating itself ; and only our incapacity has prevented the process—the evolution of the major rhythms—from achieving its perfection.

§ 6. *Nature of Metre.*

(1) A perfectly regular rhythm—that is, rhythm with an entirely rigid alternation of equal prominences or crests—will scarcely occur in natural sounds ; though such rhythm can be easily produced by design (e.g. drums or tom-toms, the “ call ” in Morse code). But clearly it can only be produced when there is a sole regard for rhythm.

(2) Rhythm, however, is capable of a great range of variation without losing its appreciable nature ; the variation may affect either the strength or the spacing of its emphasis, which, however varied, we may still feel as yielding a continuously rhythmical movement. This may not always be of a uniform type of rhythm ; but on the other hand we may recognize the same rhythm through considerable differences in the prominence or distribution of

emphasis among neutral elements. In rhythms of language (which must always in prosody be considered as *speech*), we are dealing with the rhythms of a natural sound produced not with a *sole* regard to rhythm, even in Rhythmic Language as defined (§4 (3)). Rhythmic language is always a case in which the sense of rhythm triumphs over, or accommodates itself to, variability: the alternation of rhythm-crests is not quite regular, either in their force or in the proportions of their intervals, but regular enough to allow the mind to impose a rhythmic pattern on it, or hear it *in terms of*, or with reference to, a pattern; which, however, need not be a repeating pattern.

(3) Now it is clear that the expressive power of rhythm in language, as the appropriate accompaniment of syntax, must depend at last on variability; and while the variation may be such as to allow one type of rhythm to persist through it, it may also produce complete changes of rhythmic type, the language merely remaining rhythmical in a general sense; there may, that is, be continual changes in the kind of pattern with reference to which the

Principles of English Prosody

sound is schematized into a rhythm, though the changes slide easily from one kind to another, and the general rhythm is continuous. Of this nature is the rhythm of ordinary spoken language or of prose. It is probable that a complete investigation of prose-rhythms would reduce them to a number of schematic but very elastic types, which the mind always has ready for imposing on the sequence of syllables, in order to satisfy the rhythmic sense by hearing the differences of sound in terms of a recognizable pattern ; and the more easily recognizable the patterns (however frequently they change), the more rhythmical we call the language. But if the disposition of accents in a sentence strikes us as casual, that is because the variety of the intervals between the accents has not that proportion which at once suggests its formulation into a pattern ; though perhaps no sentence cannot at last be so formulated, if the desire of rhythm sufficiently insist on it. Such typical rhythms may perhaps be regarded as marked kinds of sequence which are very liable to occur in a particular language ; though literature certainly elaborates the rhythms of

common speech (and perhaps rejects some of them), and imports rhythms from one language into another (e.g. from Latin into English). And in any case the original acceptance of these sequences as rhythmic must be accounted for in the way indicated above : namely, the ability of the rhythmic sense to accommodate itself to variation. The typical rhythms of prose scarcely extend beyond quite short phrases, and any sentence may contain a large number of complete changes in type.

(4) Prose-rhythm may therefore be called Free Rhythm, in the sense that there is no limit to its variability on condition that the general nature of rhythm be maintained—i.e. *some* recognizable pattern be always audible, whether vaguely or clearly, and however frequently the kind of pattern changes. But when the rhythm of language is unmistakably heard, through all its variations, with reference to one unaltering and persistent pattern, we get a movement which differs decisively in kind, and specifically in effect, from Free Rhythm.

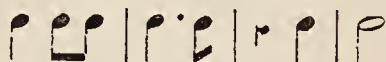
(5) A rigidly unaltering pattern of rhythm actually heard in continual repetition is impossible in speech,

Principles of English Prosody

where rhythm can never be the sole consideration. Even if we admit that a rhythm like



can, without losing its rhythmic character, become



that would not make its occurrence any more possible in speech, for the time remains rigid ; and no such rigid time occurs in speech. Time is never kept in speech, even when it is actually heard quantitatively. A general recognition of “ longs ” and “ shorts ” and of their equivalence does not imply a rigid time-scheme, quantity being notionally fixed on average comparative values underneath the real incessant *rubato* of speech—*rubato* which is not even departure from a time-scheme. Equally impossible, for corresponding reasons, would be a rigid accentual pattern in speech.

And even if any such rigid pattern could occur in language, it would obviously be unable to accompany the varying meaning of the words with appro-

priate rhythmic expressiveness, which is the function of rhythm in language.

(6) But such a pattern may nevertheless be heard in language as a schematic pattern persisting through and unfailingly characterizing the variations of rhythms which do not exactly repeat ; it can be so heard by reason of the elasticity of rhythmic appreciation, which allows certain elements of rhythm to be accepted as equivalents within a prevailing movement.

(7) Rhythm which cannot be schematized on a regular repeating pattern is Free Rhythm ; rhythm which can be so schematized is Metre. Metre then has two equally essential characters :

(i) Rhythmic *Constancy* : the pattern persisting schematically through all variations and always heard in some recognizably equivalent form.

(ii) Rhythmic *Variation* : the expressive speech-rhythm always changing over the pattern and capable of accommodating itself to the frame of the pattern without ceasing to be natural utterance.

(i) will be called the *Base*, (ii) the *Modulation*, of a metre.

Principles of English Prosody

(8) Metre, like every other form of speech, is variable rhythm, and can never be otherwise. It differs from every other form of speech in being rhythm *varying over a constancy*.* It may be summarily defined thus: *Metre is the modulated repetition of a rhythmical pattern*. (See §§ 12, 14.)

(9) The proper investigation of any metre should therefore answer these two questions :

(i) What sort of a base has it ?

(ii) What sort of a modulation does this require?

Since it is the modulation that is actually heard—though always heard as conforming to the base—and since the modulation is nothing but natural speech-rhythm, the two questions might be thus combined : By what properties of the natural sound of speech is the base maintained ?

Note. Beware of mistaking the Base for the Metre ; and of considering the essential modulation as a licence. On the other hand, beware of taking even the most elaborate

* More exactly : metre is rhythm, the variation of which constantly suggests its reference to one ideal pattern ; and if this reference is not constantly made in the act of hearing the variable rhythm, there is no metre.

account of sounds actually heard as an account of metre. There is no metre unless the sounds as they are actually heard are also referred to the constant scheme of an ideal pattern. Metre is not only heard by the ear, but perceived by the mind.

§ 7. (1) The expressive contribution of rhythm to the progress of significance depends, as has been said, on variability. Free rhythm, for this, must rely on *mere* variation. But in metre, variation is always heard against the underlying constancy of pattern : hence the variation is more instantly felt, more potent and more momentous. A slight degree of variation, by being more noticeable in metre, will be more expressive than a large variation in free rhythm ; the expressive range is, therefore, at once greater and more delicately discriminated in metre, since it always gives, along with its variations, a standard constancy against which its variations may be nicely measured.

(2) But the continuity of the base has an effect of its own, which is not less important. The expressiveness just referred to concerns the changing and progressive significance of the language ; but

Principles of English Prosody

there may be an expressiveness concerned with something static and constant—with, namely, the state of mind in which the matter of that significance occurred. Now it is very well known that an exactly repeating rhythm (the epithet “drumming” suggests the obvious instance) has a notably exciting effect; and it is an elementary law in art, that the effective will always be the expressive. Poetic expression has to convey the *whole* of the experience actuating it; and the state of mind accompanying the intense imaginative conception in which poetry originates is itself part of the whole experience. And this state of mind is precisely that kind of unappointed exaltation, that general and “massive” excitement, which a regularly repeating pattern of rhythm produces. Hence poetic experience naturally fastens for its expression on a rhythm in which the emotive insistence of a constant repetition can be felt; since the whole object of poetic expression is to effect in the mind of another what happened in the mind of the poet. And the instrument which has this general emotive effect is at the same time expressing the particular alterations in the progress-

ing significance of the poem ; just as the complex of imagination is *surrounded* in the poet's mind by a general exaltation.

Note how Whitman, an avowed rebel against metre, becomes metrical as his imagination intensifies. He could not miss such natural means of expression.

(3) Alongside of this " massive " excitement, and no doubt part of it, goes an enhanced receptivity, whereby the mind becomes much more sensitive to values and suggestions (one of the reasons why metrical language can be so much richer than prose without clogging the understanding). A notable result is that the mind is markedly predisposed by the base to accept the expressive effect of rhythmic variation given by the modulation.

(4) It should be added, that words as the medium of poetic expression are always to be taken as words spoken, whether they are spoken out loud or mentally ; and every kind of poetic effect assumes vocalization. Now metre is peremptory in its insistence on this.

The enormous expressive advantage of metre may be studied in a sort of isolation by noting its supreme effect

Principles of English Prosody

in *The Alchemist* or *Tartufe*, in *Heautontimorumenos* or many portions of Aristophanes. The language is not, and has no occasion to be, very "poetical"; but the effect, at once grand and penetrating, of everything rhythm can convey by its varying and metre by its constancy, raises such plays to an immense superiority in range and power of expression above all prose comedy.

(5) It is easy to see, then, why poetry commonly prefers metre to free rhythm: metre, both in particular things and in general, is incomparably the more expressive—capable alike of greater force and of finer subtlety of expression. The fact of poetry cannot be made to depend on metre; it must always be allowable for poetry to use free rhythm for this part of its phonetic expression. But if it does so, poetry then will always be preferring a blunt tool to a sharp one; though certainly some operations are done better by a blunt tool.

We call composition in metre, Verse; and Prosody is the Science or the Art of Verse.

§ 8. *Structure of Verse.*

(1) There are three modes of versification in English poetry. Accent is present in all of them as

an essential element ; but only one exceptional variety (exceptional in theory and at first in practice, and still exceptional in *Europe*, though now scarcely so in England) is constructed of accent alone. The three modes may be further grouped in two divisions, according as they combine with accent another rhythmic quality or a syllabic quality (§ 3 (4)). The modes of verse structure are :

(a) *Purely Rhythmic* :

(i) Quantitative or Classical.

(b) *Rhythmic plus Syllabic* :

(ii) Alliterative-accentual.

(iii) Rimed-accentual.

(2) The mechanics of these modes will be described in full later. A brief statement, in accordance with the requirements of § 6 (7, 9), will suffice here.

(i) *Quantitative Verse*. Accent and quantity are the phonetic elements required in this mode of structure ; and both must be equally heard, whether in coincidence or in contrast. Modulation is given by the natural accents of the language, the words being so arranged that the quantitative

Principles of English Prosody

succession of the syllables gives the Base, which is a fixt sequence of values measured in "longs" and "shorts." As, however, the relationship between these quantities is also fixt on a principle of equivalence, and as certain positions in the base admit substitution of equivalent value in quantity (e.g. 2 "shorts" = 1 "long"), there is, in effect, quantitative modulation. Moreover, it would be a paradox to say, that the *accents* modulate against the *quantitative* base, since modulation implies rhythm varying against a constancy of its own kind. But the quantitative base cannot but carry, as an abstract pattern of regularly disposed quantities, a system of accentuation also regularly disposed; which, in fact, really enables the base to *be* a rhythm. And it is against this pattern-accentuation of the base that the spoken accents of the verse modulate. Quantitative verse, therefore, modulates in accent and quantity against an accentual and quantitative base. (See § 3 (7).)

As a rule, the "long" elements in the base which would have the pattern-accent do not admit of "resolution"

(i.e. into “ shorts ”) ; otherwise the persistence of the base as the recognizable possibility of its rhythm would be endangered. But when, though the pattern-accent is displaced by modulation, its *place* can still be heard unaltered in the quantitative sequence, the scheme of the rhythm stands firm. It is the great advantage of the quantitative mode of verse, that even in strong modulation (i.e. displacement) of rhythm, the possibility of the constant base-rhythm is always actually heard—in the quantitative sequence. The base-rhythm here, as elsewhere, is an affair of accent ; but whilst its *vehicle* is always heard, the base-rhythm itself, in this as in every other metre, does no more than supply a constancy for modulation—it is not actually heard as unalterable rhythm.

When, as is sometimes allowable, one “ long ” and one “ short ” are interchangeable, the modulation in quantity is even more conspicuous ; and this seems clear proof that the quantitative scheme does not exist in a rigid musical time ; unless such syllables (as in choric and melic measures, meant to be sung) were “ irrational,” i.e. shortened or lengthened against their nature.

(ii) *Alliterative - accentual Verse*. The only rhythmic element employed is accent ; quantity may frequently reinforce accent, but is not heard against accent. The rhythm of the base is given purely by the numeration of accents. It is of the

Principles of English Prosody

essence of this metre that it is not schematized on accents disposed in any fixt order or any fixt succession of orders ; but every line must be clearly divided by a real sense-pause with the normal accents equally apportioned on either side of it. The effect of rhythmic modulation (i.e. not of mere variation) is given by the maintenance, through all variation, of the required accents constantly balanced in paired numbers ; and the variation is limited, both as to kind of rhythm and length of phrase, by the number of unaccented syllables which can be grouped round a fixt number of accents so as to give rhythmic satisfaction. It is because of the extremely simple nature of the modulation in this metre that its rhythmic element requires assistance from a syllabic quality ; the base—i.e. the accentual numeration—is made as obtrusive as possible by alliteration (inaccurately called “ head-rime ”), that is to say, by making the accented syllables begin with the same consonant or with a vowel, thus noticeably connecting by a syllabic characterization the structural points of the rhythm.

Some hold, that alliteration makes for ease of vocalization. If so, as this would come just where vocalization should be most emphatic, it would be important. But it is at any rate quite safe to allow alliteration to add its marked syllabic characterization in the interests of rhythmic constancy.

But the tendency of this metre towards free rhythm, and the indecision of its modulation (in spite of its remarkably majestic and exquisite expressiveness) made it unable to maintain itself when confronted with the more strictly metrical, and therefore, more subtly expressive, movement of Rimed-Accental verse.

(iii) *Rimed-accental Verse*. The rhythmic element employed is again accent, with quantity, if rhythmical at all, only subsidiary to accent. But the base to be implied, as schematic reference, by the natural speech-sound does not consist of mere numeration, but also of regular disposition of accents ; and the superior definition of modulation thus resulting makes it unnecessary to employ syllabic quality to enforce the base within the line. But the lines thus schematized on definite alternations of accents and non-accents are themselves grouped together by ending in similar sounds : that is, by rime. The structural function

Principles of English Prosody

of rime is therefore concerned with major rhythms (the inclusive rhythms of § 5) ; and these groupings of several lines under the binding influence of rime may be either continuous (e.g. couplets, terza rima) or discontinuous (i.e. in stanzas).

In a historical view, this should no doubt be the successor of Quantitative verse. But its form in English literature cannot be understood without some account of alliterative verse, which will therefore come first in our detailed description. Quantitative verse is a late intrusion into English and will come last. But versification will only be treated historically in so far as such treatment is necessary to the exposition of its method.

Since rime is not required, in this third mode of versification, for the most obvious rhythms—namely, the line-rhythms (see § 11 (1))—but only for establishing the remoter effects of rhythm—namely, the major rhythms (§ 5)—it is no extraordinary development to drop the rime : a development helped by the example (not really relevant) of quantitative verse, which, employing two distinct rhythmic elements in its structure, has no need of any syllabic element, since the interlockt complexity

of its whole rhythm, quantitative and accentual, is extremely firm, both for line-rhythm and for major rhythm. Accentual versification (based on regular disposition of accents), without structural quantity, and employing no syllabic element (alliteration or rime) to ensure either its line-rhythm or its major rhythm, is called Blank Verse ; and it is the only kind of verse in which metre results entirely from a single rhythmic element.

Accent and quantity in their rhythmic virtue are, as a matter of phonetic fact, both compound natures ; but we may conveniently take accent (= stress + pitch) as one single rhythmic element, and quantity (= quantity + stress) as another.

Blank verse has never flourished conspicuously, but has remained, on the whole, an occasional variety, except in English poetry, where, on the contrary, it has become the commonest form of metre outside lyrical poetry ; but even in English the characteristic failure of blank verse is just where we should expect it—in its major rhythm. (See § 34.)

Principles of English Prosody

The term Blank Verse in English literature is usually applied to its commonest form, the repeating five-foot line in rising rhythm (§ 25). But the combination of this line with a similar three-foot line (a combination practised with extraordinary success by several Italian poets), would be just as properly termed blank verse. Rimeless accentual verse of quite irregular line length may, however, conveniently be called Free Verse (§ 11). Recent experimental tendencies in the use of this, both in England and on the Continent, are well known. But a general view of European literature, apart from English, suggests that most languages require rime in accentual metres for the security of the larger structure of rhythm.

(3) Wherever rime and alliteration are structural in verse, they will have, as a rule, only an indirect expressive effect : it will be the effect of the whole rhythm they serve to support. Occasionally, even when structural they may add to this a direct expressive effect of their own (e.g. rime in Shelley's *The Cloud*, or Dunbar's *Ane Ballat of Our Lady*) ; and whenever they are not structural, they will always be directly expressive (e.g. rime and alliteration in quantitative verse, alliteration in rimed verse, as in *Pearl* or Montgomerie's *The Cherry and the Slae*).

This, though not strictly belonging to prosody (because not part of rhythmic expression) will be mentioned later (§ 35).

§ 9. *The Laws of Prosody.*

The general law for all versification is merely a statement in imperative form of the nature of metre as defined (§ 6 (7, 8)). Metre being the modulated repetition of a rhythmical pattern, and its expressive power (beyond which it has no conceivable function) depending on this nature being maintained, all verse must equally give Rhythmic Constancy persisting through Rhythmic Variation.

This is the sole positive Law of Prosody.

No other law has ever been formulated which amounts to anything more than a recommendation to practise certain metrical devices rather than others. But it is impossible to legislate beforehand for all possible contingencies of expressive requirement. Every metrical effect must be judged as a particular case. The notion that laws in English prosody exist only to be broken comes from the fact that such "laws" are not laws at all, but merely the arbitrary preferences of certain critics; which poets have no reason to respect, since right expression is all they are after. The

Principles of English Prosody

law above stated merely gives the general condition under which rhythmic expression is found to be most successful. If rhythmic expression were outweighed by other requirements, so as to make right expression as a whole lead to departure from the above law, the result would not be verse, and not, therefore, the subject of prosody.

§ 10. (1) From this positive law follow two (and only two) negative laws or prohibitions in prosody :

(i) Verse must not give a repeating pattern without any variation.

(ii) The variation must not destroy the repeating pattern.

For in either case metre would cease to exist.

(2) It would not be proper to invoke either of these prohibitions in the case of any single line, which might easily justify itself in its context. It is, in fact, in the nature of metre that the prosodic law cannot be felt to fulfil itself except in a considerable range of movement ; for as the base is only actually heard in modulation, it cannot be established by a single instance of modulation. But in practice the majority of bases are so familiar that they can

be instantly recognized. Ambiguity, however, does occur (§ 18 (6, 7).)

A *tendency* towards either of the above prohibitions will be a fault in versification, since it will in either case diminish expressiveness. While the second of the above prohibited cases obviously occurs, the first is scarcely possible in language; but the fault, the tendency towards it, may easily be instanced.

The progress of blank verse in the Elizabethan drama gives a simple and excellent example of the two metrical faults. The verse of *Gorboduc*, at the beginning of the period, comes perhaps as near as language can to an exactly repeating pattern. Most of the lines taken singly would be respectable enough, but collectively they are intolerable, because their modulation in the bulk is negligible. The verse of *Shirley*, at the end of the period, frequently loses all recognizable pattern, though he is also frequently a fine artist in reducing intractable speech-rhythms to metrical form. Most of his lines, again, taken singly, could be "scanned" on the blank verse base; but collectively their ceaselessly extravagant

Principles of English Prosody

variation stifles metrical expressiveness because the base becomes negligible.

§ 11. *Regular and Irregular Versification.*

(1) A line of verse should be a complete sentence of rhythm ; that is to say, it should be the modulation of a pattern capable of existing as a whole. This is usually shown by the fact that the pattern repeats, either by itself, or as a member of a regularly repeating order of such patterns.

(2) For versification may consist of one or of several repeating patterns of rhythm ; and versification may be continuous or discontinuous. Continuous versification is usually a single repeating pattern (iambics, hexameters ; blank verse ; couplets, terza rima) ; but may be two alternating patterns (elegiacs ; Vaughan's *The Relapse*, Browning's *The Englishman in Italy*)—the tendency in this latter case being, however, for the lines, both as rhythm and as sense, to group themselves markedly in pairs, thus forming a sort of elementary stanza. Any more extended grouping of lines in an order of rhythmic patterns would decisively interrupt con-

tinuity of versification, and produce a clear stanzaic movement.

The major rhythms of continuous versification will always be in paragraphs of indeterminate extent, or rather of extent determined solely by immediate expressive needs (§ 34).

(3) Discontinuous versification again may be of one or of several repeating patterns of rhythm ; but the lines are arranged in definitely recurring discrete groups, whether of the same pattern or of a repeating order of several patterns. A group of either kind may be called a stanza.

A stanza is, therefore, itself a major rhythm of several lines ; and discontinuous or stanzaic versification is thus characterized by its structural provision of formality not only for line-rhythms but for major rhythms also (§ 35).

What this really means is, that the abstract stanza-pattern is to the major rhythm what the base is to the line-rhythm. Read a few stanzas of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* or Milton's *Nativity Ode* and this will be evident.

Where the stanzas are of indeterminate length they are not properly stanzas at all, but paragraphs.

Principles of English Prosody

(4) Quantitative verse can only construct stanzas (with the rigidity required to make stanzaic movement recognizable) by exhibiting several patterns repeated in regular order (usually an order containing some variation of the type of rhythm : sapphics, alcaics, melic forms). The mere disposition (by the sense, the only available means) of the same repeated quantitative pattern into regular batches of lines would not produce the decisive formality of major rhythm which is the characteristic of stanzaic versification.

But riming verse can by its nature construct equally decisive stanzas either of one repeating pattern (quatrains, ottava rima, etc.), or of several patterns (Spenserians, Ballad metre, stanzas of Milton's *Nativity Ode*, Marvell's *Horatian Ode*, etc.). A riming stanza can also consist of different types of rhythm, consolidated into one formal major rhythm by the binding influence of rime, as in the chorus "Who shall put a bridle" in Swinburne's *Erechtheus*; or in Campion's lyric "Harke al you ladies" (XIX in *A Booke of Ayres*; see § 35), where each stanza combines disyllabic and trisyllabic

accentual rhythms with an actual quantitative rhythm, the interlocking system of rimes binding quantitative to trisyllabic and trisyllabic to disyllabic rhythm, thus producing marked solidity of stanza form out of very diverse movements.

(5) Rime allows also of a further development of formal major rhythm, by “concatenation” (§ 35), or the linking together of one whole stanza to another (or of several stanzas into a chain) by carrying one conspicuous rime over into the next stanza, or by making a line rime not within the stanza but with the corresponding line in the next stanza (an example of the first is *Pearl*; of the second, Swinburne’s *Laus Veneris*).

(6) Blank verse stanzas have been attempted. As in quantitative verse, the only method available is to exhibit a repeating order of several patterns: regular batches of blank verse lines of the same pattern would give no stanzaic decision. Collins’s *Ode to Evening* is the best known instance; the two varying patterns employed are of the same type of rhythm. This beautiful poem certainly has a stanzaic movement, but of a certain faltering and indecisive kind

Principles of English Prosody

(which may suit its subject); and the rhythms (i.e. major rhythms) have been criticized as ineffective. It would seem likely that if quantitative verse usually requires for a decisive stanza not merely varying patterns but varying kinds of pattern, this would still more be the case with blank verse, which must rely entirely on accent for all its rhythms, without any structural help from quantity or from any syllabic quality. Carducci's *Odi Barbare* provide splendid instances of rimeless accentual verse yielding decisive stanzas by the use of different types of rhythm, frankly on the quantitative analogy (though the rhythms actually employed have no real quantitative parallel). A recent instance in English is Robert Bridges' *Our Lady*, in which, without relying on classical instances, a firm rimeless stanza is constructed out of our habitual rhythms; but this kind of experiment has so far been unusual in English poetry.

(7) All the above are forms of regular versification; either a single pattern, or an order of patterns, regularly repeats, and by repetition establishes its base or bases—i.e. establishes itself as metre.

In fact, however, the base of a familiar metre will be instantly recognized without any repetition, so long as it is not first given in some unusual modulation ; as it is for example in Browning's *Nympholeptos*, where the base of the first line

“ Still you stand, still you listen, still you smile,”

would hardly be recognized until the second line had been read. But such cases are exceptional. Moreover, successive lines which all differ from each other merely in their lengths as sentences of rhythm, but have the same rhythmic elements or type of movement, are certainly different patterns of rhythm (§ 27); but there would be no difficulty in recognizing their bases and thus accepting the lines as metre, however often the rhythm changed, because there would be no change in type, and the rhythmic sense easily adopts a simple change in length. This it is that makes irregular versification possible, in which metrical expression comes as the result of varying patterns following each other in no recurring order. Examples are : in rimed verse, *Lycidas*, Patmore's *Odes*, some of T. E. Brown's later lyrics ; in part-

Principles of English Prosody

rimed verse, Leopardi's *Canti* and the choruses (in part) of *Samson Agonistes* ; in rimeless verse, Tasso's *Aminta*, Guarini's *Pastor Fido*, the choruses of *Samson Agonistes* again, M. Arnold's *The Future*. (The Italian instances are given for contrast with the English : irregular verse in the hands of Tasso and Leopardi does not show anything like the range of irregularity we get from Milton (*Samson*), Patmore or Arnold ; whether because a slight departure from the regular is enough to serve the Italian turn, or because English verse is capable of a larger departure from the regular without ceasing to be metrical.)

The major rhythm of irregular verse will of course always be paragraphic ; and the justification of irregular verse will, as a rule, come from its ability to build up major rhythm into assured masses. (See § 34.)

(8) In each of these instances, the pattern is of the same type ; however the base varies in length, the same elementary movement persists through it, and the speech-rhythm being always heard as modulation of this, is heard as metre. The nature of metre may also still be maintained even when the

base varies not only in length but in type, i.e. when one elementary movement does not persist; provided that the change in type involves some easy transition, and only a few types are used; as in M. Arnold's *Strayed Reveller* (where the types used are only two, and the change only involves an easily understood shift of basic accent), or in the soliloquies towards the end of his *Empedocles on Etna*. In the latter case, however, metre begins to be dubious, and to border on free rhythm; it is not always possible for the rhythmic sense so to adapt itself to the changing rhythms as to hear them as modulation of any recognizable bases, which could be instantly supplied as the constancy required by prosodic law. Unless this can be done, in irregular versification, metre must fail.

For, if the type of pattern continually changes—and by a change of type is meant a change from one rhythm to another which cannot be accepted as its equivalent—if it constantly changes without according to some order of change (which order would then itself become a kind of pattern), it is clear that irregular versification must become indistinguishable

Principles of English Prosody

from free or prose rhythm. If there is no constancy, there is no metre ; irregular versification can only exist when it establishes a constancy of typical movement in place of an actually constant base. Clear rhythm by itself will not give versification. But when free rhythm has all its phrases markedly asserted and of familiar kinds ; when it avoids all neutral sequences or mere filling up between phrase and phrase, and when there is an evident expressiveness in the rhythms, we get a species of free rhythm which is so emphatic in its rhythmic quality as to seem like something in between prose and verse (e.g. the *Authorized Version* in many passages, the Greek text of *The Wisdom of Solomon*, and a great deal of Whitman). The gradations between this and ordinary prose are infinite ; and many pages of De Quincey will show how swiftly and easily the transition may be made. But the change to versification is not by any gradation, but is sharp and decisive ; it comes when we get, not mere shifting from one type of rhythm to another, but equivalence—one rhythm capable of being heard with reference to another, each able to replace the other without

radically altering the general movement ; for then we get a repeating rhythm heard in modulation.

§ 12. (1) Certain assumptions implied in § 11 should now be explicitly stated. They are very simple. The nature of metre requires a stanza either to consist of repeating rhythms or to be itself a repeating order of rhythms ; and just so the nature of metre requires a line either to consist of one rhythmic element several times repeated, or to be itself a repeating order of varying rhythmic elements. When the rhythm is given by accents, these elements will either be accents, or accents with non-accents attached ; and since we are merely considering sentences of rhythm without regard to their syntax, there is no reason why these elements should be whole or single words. We are, indeed, really considering the base of the rhythm, abstracted from its verbal embodiment. Thus the base-rhythm (or it would usually suffice to say, the rhythm) of blank verse consists of repetition of one rhythmic element ; but in the following lines (Campion, *A Booke of Ayres*, XVII)

Principles of English Prosody

Your faire looks enflame my desire (1)

Quench it again with love. (2)

Stay, O strive not still to retire, (3)

Doe not inhuman prove. (4)

not only do lines 1 and 3 differ from lines 2 and 4, but within each line the rhythmic elements are of different kinds (§ 28), the two orders of varying elements in lines 1 and 2 being repeated in lines 3 and 4.

(2) A rhythmic element in which non-accent proceeds to accent is called Rising ; a line of such elements is called Rising Rhythm, or if such elements predominate the line may be said, less precisely, to have Rising Movement. For the opposite case, accent proceeding to non-accent, the corresponding term is Falling. Blank Verse is Rising Rhythm ; the lines just quoted from Campion show both Rising and Falling Rhythm in each line.

For the real meaning of these terms see § 3 (5). It may be useful sometimes to bring in Level Rhythm, which of course is a mere succession of accents with no intervening non-accents.

These rhythmic elements are the Feet in Scansion ; and after that term has been introduced they will be called

The Elements

§ 12 (3)

Rising or Falling Feet. But the term Foot in Scansion has a wider reference than what is here meant by the rhythmic elements, which belong simply to the base.

Where a line contains several kinds of rhythmic element, it will be obvious also that it will contain several kinds of modulation: for each kind of rhythmic element in the base will require its own kind of modulation unless the order of elements is to fail. For this reason, lines consisting of several kinds of rhythm are likely to be much less freely modulated than those consisting of one repeated element of base-rhythm: otherwise they endanger their metrical rhythm as a whole.

(3) It may be thought that too much stress has been laid on the merely mechanical fact of repetition. But indeed this mechanical fact is the essential fact in metre. Any metrical rhythm comes originally by virtue of repetition; but in the case of familiar metres or types of metre, the base may be instantly recognized, and the form of its modulation in words will thereby also be at once perceived; and then we have in effect a recognized *constancy* of rhythm

Principles of English Prosody

modulated—which is all that is required for metre. Thus, when a piece of blank verse rhythm occurs embedded in prose composition (which is considered a fault by some) the measure, as we say, is at once recognized: that is, the familiar base is heard embodying itself in, or schematizing, some verbal modulation, and for that moment the effect of blank verse obtains. That effect is more noticeable than the surrounding prose-rhythm, and not simply because of the familiarity and regularity of the pattern, but also because the pattern has a greater characterizing force. That is to say, it compels into conformity with its ideal disposition a much greater variety of modulation than is the case with the patterns of prose-rhythm. The compulsion exerted by these latter is merely to equalize, in rhythmic value, varieties in the degree of speech accent and varieties in the spacing effect of unaccented syllables. But the compulsion over speech-rhythm exerted by a pattern felt, in the midst of prose, to be metrical, goes much further than this; it can compel one *order* of accent and non-accent in the speech-rhythm to be heard as the equivalent

of a different—e.g. the reverse—order in the pattern : as when, if a blank verse line is detected in a prose sentence, the first two syllables may be a falling sequence and yet will be irresistibly referred to a pattern of rising sequences throughout. This metrical relation of actual to ideal rhythm is thus different in kind from the way the sense of abstract pattern-rhythm merely stabilizes the actual rhythms of prose. This is a reference to an ideal pattern much more remote from the actual and yet much more cogent ; so that it may even be a reference of one disposition of accents to another. And it is this sudden change in the way the rhythm is heard—the change from hearing mere direct instances of rhythmic phrases, to hearing a whole sentence of rhythm measured, for its total modulated conformity, against a pattern of simpler regularity—it is this sharp change in the appeal to the sense of rhythm, that makes the accident of a blank verse line so conspicuous in a mass of prose-rhythm. But, of course, this sudden metrical effect could not have occurred unless its possibility had already been established by repetition elsewhere ; a con-

Principles of English Prosody

stancy that has been often heard persisting through many modulations is recalled and supposed in this particular modulation. But it is doubtful whether such odd bits of rhythm, however easily disposed in metrical schemes, should seriously be considered as metre. A single stanza, however, which does not repeat, which does not even contain repeating lines, could very well be considered as metre, provided the possibility of repetition is instantly apparent; for that possibility means no more than the perception of recognizable bases being modulated into words in each line. Effective recognition of a base is all that is required. But unless the mind can accept a constancy, however derived, as schematizing the rhythm, there can be no metre; and constancy can only be ultimately derived from repetition, actual or understood.

In the case of quantitative verse—as when a new fragment of Sappho's, an unattacht line or piece of a line, is discovered—the question is simplified by the actual existence of the quantitative pattern of the base; and the only thing to be decided would be, how the base “runs”—i.e. the exact

rhythm basic accent is to give to basic quantity. Even here, however, repetition is implied; the stray line is only heard as metre because it is felt that its base would be capable of maintaining itself through many other modulations of language.

(4) Repetition or the capacity for repetition being the essential fact, it is not perhaps necessary to distinguish more sharply between prose-rhythm and verse-rhythm. The plain fact is that the patterns of prose-rhythm *do* not regularly repeat, and therefore *do* not make verse; there is no necessity at all to show that they *could* not. It is obvious that many of them could. Sir T. Browne's prose, for example, seems frequently hovering on the verge of metre; thus, when he writes

“The Egyptian mummies, which Cambyzes
or time hath spared, avarice now consumeth.
Mummy is become merchandise, Mizraim cures
wounds, and Pharaoh is sold for balsams,”

it is impossible not to notice that these two sentences

Principles of English Prosody

end with an identical and very marked phrase of rhythm :

“ avarice now consumeth ”

“ Pharaoh is sold for balsams,”

and it is such a striking phrase that very few consecutive repetitions would be enough to set up incontestably the condition of metre. And it is evident that only rhythms of striking and convincing pattern will be able to persist schematically through a series of consecutive modulations. Most of the rhythms of prose are too indecisive and unsteady to be capable of unmistakably characterizing into one prevailing movement a succession of varying speech-sounds. Equivalence, which alone makes metre possible, will only occur when the standard pattern has a certain marked regularity ; a very complex order of rhythmic elements will seldom have the required decision. But no binding principles can be laid down. So long as a pattern does repeat in equivalent forms, metre results ; and probably a pattern capable of so repeating will be easily recognized even in a single instance of it—when the metre will seem just about to result. And

if it is of a very unmistakable type, so that the speech-rhythm is at once felt as modulating a pattern that could continue, there will be all the effect of metre.

It has already been shown that in irregular versification repetition is sufficiently provided by the constant *type* of characteristic rhythm through varying line-length.

§ 13. *Scansion.*

(1) The Art of Prosody consists in applying the laws of §§ 9, 10—which is no more than to say, it consists in using the nature of metre—for purposes of expression. *How* these laws are to be so applied cannot of course, be reduced to rule ; the sole test is empirical—is the verse effective or not ? It is not that the composition of poetry is a purely instinctive act, an automatism that follows in some happy natures immediately on experience ; on the contrary, it is a highly intellectual act presided over by the judgment, though it is *inspired*, as we say, i.e. actively conditioned, down to the last detail, by the experience which has to be expressed—and

Principles of English Prosody

experience, though intellect may enter into it, is itself nothing intellectual. Now, no doubt, the grounds of judgment are always at last unsearchable ; but they are not more mysterious in poetry than in any other activity. The thing is, that every act of poetic composition is so complex that no rules could be formulated capable of really governing the simplest case. The poet has open to him the whole tradition of his art ; and the tradition is no more than the whole range of technical methods that have been found to work. No poet can do otherwise than apply the tradition to his own purposes ; and his education consists in knowing what his instrument has been proved capable of doing, in order to infer from that what it will prove capable of doing in his hands. No doubt, for single aspects of experience, rules of expression could be laid down ; but experience never presents itself in single aspects, and the essence of poetic expression is to give, moment by moment, all possible aspects of an experience simultaneously : hence metaphor and the use of all the suggestive values of words and their sounds, and hence, above all, metre, in poetry.

But no artistic expression can ever be anything but symbolic ; can never, therefore, be really complete. The poet has to choose what he will express, and what must escape, of his inspiration ; and his choice will be determined by his knowledge of his instrument. (He has to allow, it should be remembered, not only for the immediate insistence of his matter, but also for its subsequent formality.) And in what is left, the first thing in importance is to preserve the proportion and just balance of the elements, the complicated fusion of which will require a complicated fusion of technical devices. No set rules could apply to all this ; and the only method practicable will be empiric—the method of trial and error : the decision of which will always be governed by the elementary law of all technique—that the effective is also the expressive : that, for example, if a certain shapeliness produces the effect of a certain wholeness, that shapeliness will be the expression of that wholeness, and if a rhythm has a startling effect, it will express the feeling of being startled. The Art of Prosody is, therefore, not a matter of rules and prescriptions, but of the empirical use of certain laws which are

Principles of English Prosody

themselves no more than general statements of the methods that actually have proved capable of being used for expressive purposes. Any "art of prosody" that professes to explain how prosodic expression is to be obtained, beyond a description of the proved means available to obtain it, is to be profoundly mistrusted. Prosody as an art is not the subject of this treatise.

The Science of Prosody consists in detecting the operation of the laws of §§ 9, 10 in instances of the art.

To what end? The only true answer is, In order to acquire organized information. There are those who prefer information, if they want it at all, to be disorganized; and these would never be convinced that an achievement is the better understood for an understanding of its methods.

(2) By Prosody this treatise will henceforth mean the Science of Prosody. The matter as well as the method of the investigation on which Prosody is usually employed, is Scansion.

Note. Scansion has nothing whatever to do with the Art, but is concerned solely with the Science, of Prosody. What sort of rhythm a poet should use on any occasion, is

not a question for Scansion to answer ; it merely enquires, What sort of rhythm he did use. Prosody may go on to enquire, Why he used that rhythm ; but it is an enquiry that hardly belongs to *Scansion*, which merely submits the evidence.

It may be as well to emphasize once more, that the laws which Scansion employs, and which make its results a coherent body of knowledge (i.e. a Science) and not a mass of unrelated facts—these laws are not laid down *a priori*, for the deduction of prosodic fact, but are abstract summaries of what we find occurring, general statements of the nature of metrical rhythm ; and Scansion shows how particular cases fall within these laws.

Scansion is the exhibition of the natural speech-rhythm of verse in its metrical form. Scansion does not establish the verse-rhythm as metre ; that is done, if at all, in the hearing of the verse ; and scansion has to show *how* it is done. Since what is actually heard in verse is the natural sound of the words, but, since, if there is metre, this is heard with reference to a constant schematic pattern of rhythm, the problem of scansion is to show, precisely and unmistakably, the manner of the reference ; and, of course, the reference of actual sound to schematic

Principles of English Prosody

pattern has not been made out if the sound is distorted : for that would be not referring it to, but altering it to, a constant pattern, which would violate the very nature of metre (§ 10). In order to establish this reference of actual sound to schematic pattern, some notation must be employed.

Scansion, then, is the method of employing a notation in order to show how the spoken rhythm of verse exhibits in Modulation the rhythm of the Base (§ 6 (7).)

(3) The phenomenon most conspicuously brought out by scansion will, therefore, always be Equivalence ; for without equivalence there would be no possibility of a Base being given in Modulation. The term has been already used (§§ 6 (6), 12 (3)), but must now be more exactly accounted for ; and this will involve a fuller statement of some other matters that have hitherto been implied rather than explained. Equivalence in its original sense referred to quantitative versification, and signified the possibility of a definitely proportioned exchange of long syllables for short or of short for long (the conditions of the exchange being limited by the metre).

(For notation of longs and shorts see below.)

Thus if $\frac{\text{Long}}{2} = \text{Short}$, -- is the equivalent of - ∪ ∪ or ∪ ∪ -; and there may sometimes be the further resolution of -- into ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪. But it does not necessarily follow that - ∪ ∪ and ∪ ∪ - are equivalents; whether that is so or not would depend on the metre.

But precisely the same fundamental necessities of rhythm in language which call for quantitative equivalence also call for similar possibilities of exchange as regards accentuation; and although quantitative and accentual equivalence are completely different in kind, yet since the final result of both is the same—namely, the formal constriction of mere rhythm into metre, with all the superior expressiveness of metre (§ 7)—they may both be consistently classed under the same general term.

(4) The notation for scanning verse which will be employed must first be stated. A complete phonetic notation employs one order of signs for stress and another for tone; but since (§ 3 (5)) these two unite in their effect on rhythm—i.e. as *accent*—a notation representing their combined

Principles of English Prosody

incidence will suffice for scansion. In accordance with the usual association of stress and tone (§ 3 (5)), the acute accent which really represents rising tone, will be used to mark strong accent : / . The absence of accent will then be shown clearly enough by the absence of the sign ; but it will sometimes be convenient to mark a lesser degree of accent. The grave accent is not suitable for this (\), since its real meaning is falling tone, and the tone is just as likely to rise on a weak as on a strong stress ; and though the tone often does actually fall with a stress, this is not more likely to happen when the stress is weak. While / represents a full accent, then, a half-accent or subsidiary accent will be represented by the vertical stroke (|). For reasons given in § 14, the infinitely varying gradations of accent actually occurring in speech are sufficiently represented in scansion by these two grades, / and | . Any attempt at closer accuracy is mistaken, and would merely confuse the notation.

In accentual metres (§ 8 (2), (ii) and (iii)), the incidence of these signs will suffice to show the rhythm ; but in quantitative metres (§ 8 (2), (i)), it

§ 13 (5)

(5) When it is required, as it frequently is in scansion, to represent the abstract rhythm or base of a metre, the quantitative notation already provides for this ; the base will be shown as a succession of longs and shorts with their accents : thus the base of the long lines in Sapphic stanzas is

(the possible modulations of the quantities being also usually shown).

The vast majority of metres to be scanned in English poetry are accentual, and here, therefore, we need do no more than represent the succession of syllables with the spacing of the accents. A dash will be used to represent any syllable, so that — will be any accented syllable, — will be any unaccented syllable. Thus the base of blank verse is

83

Principles of English Prosody

no regard being had to quantity in the base here, and the syllable with half-accent (˘) occurring only in modulation.

Some anticipation of the matter of Part II will be inevitable in the account of Scansion, in order to provide it with concrete instances. These must only be taken as examples of practice ; any theoretical justification they may require will be found later. Blank verse is appealed to in the following sections of Part I as a type which conveniently illustrates the problems of scansion ; but what is asserted of blank verse is meant to stand for versification in general.

A notation derived from musical signs will also be very occasionally used for accentual metres ; but this will be described when its peculiar function and limitation can be more easily appreciated.

§ 14. *Equivalence.*

(1) No two lines of verse have identical rhythm unless they have identical words in identical context.

The difference may be slight, and may be almost entirely in the intonation (§ 3 (5)) ; but it will be there, and very perceptible. Thus several different

The Elements

§ 14 (2)

rhythms—differing chiefly, but not entirely, in intonation—might be given to the line

Never, never, never, never, never,

according as the context required it to be interrogative, triumphant, despairing ; and certainly if the context gave the line great force of indignant interrogation, the accentuation of it would clearly increase from start to finish, whereas if it were strongly despairing, its accentuation would decrease from start to finish, a markedly rising intonation accompanying the one, and a falling intonation the other.

(2) Thus we see that not only do no two lines perfectly agree in accentuation, but the accentuation may vary remarkably in the same line. And in fact, a very little careful observation will suggest, that perhaps no line in which several accents occur will show quite uniform accentuation ; for no succession of words will ever be likely to maintain accentuation at one unvarying force.

So that when a base is supposed of this nature

— / — / — / — / — /

Principles of English Prosody

it merely means that the base consists of *accents* disposed in this manner ; but not that it prescribes any degree of accent. No verse can ever be expected to give the rhythm of the base, which presumes, merely for the purpose of a standard, an equality of unspecified accentuation ; for probably no succession of words would ever be spoken with five identical accents.

(3) The base is an ideal rhythm and is only ideally heard ; it can never be realized in any rhythm of language (since that can never be a series of sounds conditioned solely by rhythm), but it can decisively assert itself by compelling an actually varying series of natural rhythms to be heard with unmistakable reference to its standard ; and there is then an ideal constancy of rhythm presiding over an actual variation.

(4) Misunderstanding of the nature of verse frequently comes of a belief that the bases on which it is composed are derived from some ancient and unexamined authority, or are due to the mere obeying of precedent. Tradition prescribes nothing ; but it advises a great deal. For tradition is simply

the general stock of methods that have been known to succeed. There is no authority valid in poetry except the necessity for exact expression ; and it is pretty safe to say that no technical device will maintain itself unless it is expressively good. The complication of expressive virtues in versification has been explained (§ 7) ; and this means, the composition of rhythms with reference to a base.

(5) The science of prosody is not concerned with the composition of verse, but with the hearing of it. The manner in which the base asserts itself in composition is, however, analogous with the manner of its assertion in hearing.

Suppose a passage of blank verse were to be heard for the first time in the world. It would, of course, be rhythmical from the start, and it could scarcely fail to suggest that its rhythms were designed. But it would not at first be metrical. Very soon, however, though no rhythms would quite repeat, it would be noticed that each succeeding line tended to conform to a certain regularity of pattern ; and as more and more variations followed, all showing themselves similarly conformable, so the pattern would become

Principles of English Prosody

more and more evident and decisive. Until at last (precisely at what stage is immaterial) conformability with the pattern would be *expected*, and each varying rhythm would be heard *with a reference* to the pattern ; rhythm, that is to say, would have become *metre* ; the variations of rhythm would all imply a repeating constancy of ideal rhythm. And if the movement of the passage were of this kind :

Of man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste, etc.

the ideal constancy of rhythm continually felt to be implied by every line—the *base* of the metre—would be

— / — / — / — / — /

though no single line would actually give that base. It would be felt as the schematic reference for every line.

Such a base must not be supposed as given *a priori*, though it will be instantly recognized when the metre is familiar—i.e. when its customary modulations are familiar, when we recognize those varieties of rhythm which do, in our experience,

usually occur in clear conformity with this base. Once established, the base asserts itself decisively ; but it can only be established by the same conformability persisting through several variations—and then, the base established, the rhythms cease to be merely *conformable*, and instead manifestly *conform*. But this comes from a prevailing movement. If the passage had not been from *Paradise Lost*, but had been these lines from R. Bridges' *Demeter* :

Mighty Demeter, mother of the seasons,
Bountiful all-sustainer, fairest daughter
Of arch-ancestral Rhea—to thee Zeus sendeth
Kindly message. He grieves seeing thy godhead
Offended wrongly at eternal justice,
'Gainst destiny ordain'd idly revolting ;

then, if the passage had ended there, the base given above would hardly have established itself, but instead of it something perhaps of this nature

_ / _ _ _ / _ _ _ / _ _ _ / _ _ _ / _ _

which again, of course, would never be actually heard.*

* As the passage continues, the verse reverts to the normal blank verse movement of the rest of the dialogue ; and then we

Principles of English Prosody

Even when we take, therefore, the simplest case of metrical rhythm, we find that it has occurred by virtue of equivalence. For if we take, as representative of the last base, the line

Mighty Demeter, mother of the seasons ;

or as representative of the base

— / — / — / — / — /

the line

That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed ;

we see that the accents of the base are not all represented by the same degree of accentuation on the words ; and that, therefore, all the varying accents of the language are accepted as equivalent in the

see that the lines just quoted are also on the blank verse base. The modulation is unusual less in its nature than its persistence. This implies considerable confidence in the power of such a well-known base to assert itself through extreme modulation—extreme here because kept up in a similar kind. But I am pretending that the lines are being read by a mind not prepossessed with that most compelling pattern, the blank verse base. Such a mind, in order to create what it reads into verse, must establish its own base out of the prevailing movement.

rhythm. And since this must always necessarily be so, and can never be avoided, it is evident that any notation which professes to give the complete range of accentuation or anything near it, will be not only unnecessary but misleading. Unnecessary, because the nature of metre requires no such thing as the reproduction in speech-rhythm of the uniform accentuation supposed in the base; misleading, because it would tend to make the nature of metre rest in speech-sound as actually heard, instead of in speech-sound heard with reference to an ideal constancy; and for the purpose of that reference the mere fact of accent being perceptible is sufficient, without regard to the strength of the accent.

(6) Thus the fact of equivalence comes in at the very outset of the analysis of metre; and, indeed, it is not only metre, but rhythm itself, that implies equivalence, so far as rhythm in language is concerned. For the simplest and fluidest prose-rhythm is only heard as rhythm because it affects the mind by a certain disposition of accents and non-accents, in which the dispersal of the accents suggests some

Principles of English Prosody

typical order of variation. But it is simply the fact of accent variably alternating with non-accent that gives this order, whatever it may be : the accents merely have to be recognizable in order to effect rhythm. And since the recognizable accents in language are by no means invariable in their force, it follows that there will be many degrees of accent all equally efficient in producing rhythm. That is to say, all the accents of speech, however different in force, may, so long as they are evident, be equivalent in the establishing of rhythm.

(7) This is the most elementary form of equivalence. But it is necessary to examine more closely into the genesis of metre ; and for that purpose we take again the opening lines of *Paradise Lost* :

- (1) Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
- (2) Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
- (3) Brought Death into the world, and all our woe,
- (4) With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
- (5) Restore us and regain the blissful seat. . . .

We hear the first line as the following rhythm :

(1) — / / — — / — — — /

and it is immaterial to the rhythm, that the accents are not all of equal force ; and, moreover, we recognize the shape of the rhythm by the mere distribution of the accents among the non-accents, without requiring the intervals between the accents to be exactly given by the number of the non-accents : i.e. without requiring the degree of separation between the second and third accents to be to the degree of separation between the third and fourth precisely as 2 is to 3, either with regard to effort or time of pronunciation. In just the same way, accepting the same kinds of equivalence, we hear the other lines as the following rhythms :

(2) — / — / — / — / — /

(3) / / — — — / — / — /

(4) — / — / — / — / — /

(5) — / — — — / — / — /

(8) So far, there is no difference between the hearing of each one of these lines and the hearing of a sentence of prose. Allowing for variations in the

force of the accents, and for variations in the spacing-effect of intervening non-accents, each line has been heard as a definite pattern of rhythm. But just as the succession of sounds in each line has been schematized into a pattern more definite than the sound actually is, so, in pursuance of this inveterate idealizing tendency, the succession of these patterns is schematized on a common basis. For it is very soon noticed, that there is one prevailing movement running through all these lines. The last six syllables of all the lines except (1) show the same rhythmic sequence :

and with this uniformity in our minds, it is easy, in the case of (1), even while actually hearing the last six syllables here as

to “understand” the omitted accent, and to take the actual sequence as substantially equivalent to

94

Moreover, in (2) and (4), the complete line completes the uniform occurrence of this movement ; and once the suggestion of the completed movement has been established, it is easy again to “ understand ” the omitted accent in the first four syllables of (5), and so to accept its

— — — — —
 /

as substantially equivalent to

— — — — —
 / /

and also to accept as similarly equivalent the transposed accentuation of the first four syllables of (1) and (3). This piecemeal scrutiny is not an account, but only a diagrammatic analysis, of what really happens ; and, of course, if the general movement is familiar, nothing like this gradual process of its elucidation will be gone through. Instead, we shall start off with its possibility in our minds, and any sequence capable of being regarded as its modification will be referred to it. But in any case, within the general type of a manifestly prevailing movement, a very large range of equivalence is possible—equivalence relating not merely to the force but to

Principles of English Prosody

the disposition of accents. Until, within its rhythmic circumstance, to be justified by the place and manner of its occurrence, such a line as

Burnt after them to the bottomless pit,

which can only be heard as

$\frac{'}{—} \frac{'}{—} — — — — \frac{'}{—} — — \frac{'}{—},$

may be accepted as equivalent, within the prevailing movement, to

$— \frac{'}{—} — \frac{'}{—} — \frac{'}{—} — \frac{'}{—} — \frac{'}{—}.$

(9) This, then, is the *base* to which actual speech-rhythm is referred when it is heard not merely as rhythm but as metre—in this case as the metre of blank verse. And the fact of such a reference as that last being made at all, is only possible because the base has been so definitely established and its requirements so unfailingly satisfied as to make any conceivable reference to it convincing and obvious.

(10) Note that the establishment of the base does not simply mean that it has become accepted as a

sort of average rhythm. No doubt it is that at first, or until it has become familiar. But so long as it is only that, there is no *metre*. Metre begins only when every particular line is immediately referred to the average or base, and accepted as satisfactory by the decision of that reference—the decision as to whether it is a possible variant of the base, a variant capable of standing as its equivalent. The hearing of rhythm as metre consists in the operation of this reference of actual varying rhythm to an ideal constant rhythm.

(11) And scansion, as far as we have developed it, enables us to see something of what is involved by this reference. When we say that

Búrnt áfter them to the bóttomless píť

is a blank verse line, we mean that we superimpose, as it were, its rhythm

— / — — — — — / — — — /

on the fixť pattern we have ready to measure it against,

— / — / — / — / — / — /

Principles of English Prosody

and find that in the passage in question it can take the place of the latter ; the whole spacing-out of emphasis and non-emphasis in the actual rhythm occupies the same room as the whole standard pattern, irrespective of the extreme divergence both in the number and in the arrangement of the accents. Such divergence is of course exceptional ; but it well illustrates the most elementary requirement of the base which must be satisfied if rhythm is to become metre : the total spacing-out of the sound of a line given by alternation of accent and non-accent must, when extended against the base, fall in as a whole with the total spacing-out of the latter. The mere fact of this reference to the base implies, of course, that this does not happen in isolation, but in the prevailing movement, actual or recalled.

§ 15. *Metrical Feet.*

(1) But it is necessary to develop the mechanics of scansion in order to understand more exactly the reference of speech-rhythm to ideal pattern. And this can be done by an elaboration that suggests itself unavoidably. For in a base

The Elements

§ 15 (1)

consisting of definitely alternating accents and non-accents, the natural prominence of the accents causes the non-accents to attach themselves closely in an invariable arrangement to the accents, there being no sense-pause or word-division to embarrass this. The rhythm thus disposes itself into a series of small rhythmical groups or molecules, each consisting of an accent with one or more non-accents closely adhering ; a series of such rhythmical molecules as — ' , or ' — , or — — ' , or — ' — . And in thinking of the abstract rhythm of the base, an infinitesimal pause—or sense of transition from one group to another—easily and unmistakably asserts itself between the molecules, which are then called *Feet* : and the feet are named, generally, in accordance with §§ 3 (5), 12 (2), Rising, Falling, Mixt or Level, the two first being by far the most common ; the feet being also named according to the number of syllables in them, e.g. :

Rising disyllabic — ' Falling disyllabic ' —
Rising trisyllabic — — ' Falling trisyllabic ' — —
Mixt — ' —
Level ' ' —

Principles of English Prosody

(2) Thus we may now write the notation of the blank verse base as follows :

— ' | — ' | — ' | — ' | — ' |

and we may define blank verse as versification on a base of five disyllabic rising feet.

It is evident that, when the base is so given, we have a much clearer idea than before of its nature. We see it not only as a repeating sentence of rhythm, but we see the repeating elements of which the sentence is made. And it is further evident, that if we also divide the actual versification into feet analogous with those of the base, we have a much clearer idea of the nature of the modulation. Thus, if we now scan

Broug^ht déath | into | the wórld | and ál^l | our wóe

we at once see not only precisely *where* the base is modulated, but precisely also *what* the modulation is—what rhythmic elements not given in the base have been substituted for basic elements : in this case, ' ' for the first basic foot and — — for the second. In fact, since the sole object of scansion

The Elements

§ 15 (3)

is to show how the hearing of a verse refers its actual speech-rhythm to an ideal pattern—that is, how the speech-rhythm may be exhibited in conformity with the pattern as a modulation of this—complete scansion plainly requires foot-division.

(3) We can now see more exactly the nature of equivalence in accentual metre. Thus when we say the line

Burnt after them to the bottomless pit

is a blank verse line—that is, a rhythm in its context capable as a whole of occupying the equivalent room of a five-foot disyllabic rising base,—we have only to scan it thus

Búrnt áf|ter them | to the | bóttom|less pít

in order to see just how this comes about ; for every element in the base is now clearly seen to be represented in the verse. And though only the last foot is rising disyllabic, all the others are substitutes of recognized and usual kinds in blank verse modulation (though this particular combination of them is very unusual). And when we say, for example, that

Principles of English Prosody

the foot — — is a possible (and, in fact, an extremely common) equivalent for the basic foot in blank verse modulation, that does not mean that a foot with no accent at all is of the same absolute value as the foot — ' (which would reduce prosody to nonsense); it simply means that, within the obviously prevailing general movement given by the possibility of invariable reference to a single constant pattern, the foot — — may frequently, as a matter of empirical fact, occupy the same place in the actual rhythm as the foot — ' : and so may the foot with doubled accent, ' '. The primary equivalence referred to at the end of § 14—the equivalence of the whole rhythm of *lines*—should be now clear. When we accept a line of speech-rhythm as occupying the same room as its basic pattern, in spite of great difference in the disposition of the accents, that means that we have spaced out the sound of the line against the foot-division of the base, and found that every foot of the base has a possible representative in the sound of the verse : what *is* a possible representative being only decided empirically, by experience, and the nature of the representation

being shown by the foot-division of the actual verse.

§ 16. (1) It would be obviously incorrect to say that blank verse is made up of the foot — ' : it is the base that is so made up, i.e. whatever foot occurs in the versification represents — ', standing in place of it when the verse is spaced out in the hearing against the ideal pattern. But — — ', ' —, — — and many others are also blank verse feet, i.e. they occur in the versification.

(2) It is clear, though, that what is here meant by feet is by no means the same as what is meant by feet in the base. Granted the abstract rhythm of the base, its foot-division is *real* ; i.e. it merely makes overt what is inherent in the mere nature of such rhythm, namely, the adherence of non-accents to accents so as to form evident molecules of rhythm. But the foot-division of words, of actual sound, is notional. The boundaries of the feet may fall in the middle of words, where not even the most infinitesimal pause can be supposed ; and, on the contrary, strong sense-pauses may occur in the

Principles of English Prosody

middle of feet, so that the syllables composing the feet, so far from attracting, repel one another. The foot-division of speech-rhythm takes no notice of these things. It conveys no suggestion that the syllables within a foot necessarily cohere more than they adhere to syllables outside it ; it conveys no suggestion that poetry is heard, spoken, or composed in feet. The business of the poet is simply to find his expressive rhythm ; and when he is using repeating patterns of rhythm (i.e. metre), that is not because these are made out of feet, nor is his method of use governed by consideration of foot-division ; on the contrary, his rhythms are divided into notional feet solely for criticism, in order to show by analysis the modulatory form taken by his repeating rhythms.

(3) Feet, that is to say, belong wholly to scansion ; they are a formality used in the investigation of metre, and have nothing to do with its composition or with its real nature. Scansion by foot-division pretends to do no more than to show, by enabling us to compare any line, syllable by syllable, with the components of the base, precisely how and precisely where it modulates. It is a notation for visually

recording exactly how verse is spaced out against the standard of the pattern when we instinctively refer actual to ideal rhythm and intelligently *hear* that total equivalence of whole line to whole pattern which gives metre. What was heard and felt as equivalent may thus be *seen* as equivalent, and the precise manner of the equivalence may be seen ; without any pretence that every verse-foot is equal, each verse-foot is shown to be the representative of a base foot.

(4) In examining metres, it may often be useful to have in mind something more concrete than the base, or ideal and abstract pattern of standard rhythm. This will be provided if we allow not only a base but a *norm*, in any metre. The norm is the simplest instance (or an instance chosen as approximately the simplest) of speech-rhythm which can be referred to the base. The norm, that is, while it does not *give* the base in speech-rhythm, is a line which comes as near as may be to doing that. Thus we may take as the norm of blank verse the line

Or whére | the górgé|ous Eást | with rích|est hánd.

Principles of English Prosody

(5) The norm is sometimes identified with the base, which is clearly wrong ; and sometimes for the definition of a metre is given a definition of the norm ; which would have to be corrected by limiting the definition to a standard of reference for speech-rhythm. For though it may help criticism of blank verse to match any line with the norm, and thus sharpen *reference* to an abstract ideal by comparison with a concrete rhythm, this would become pernicious if the norm assumed therefore a superiority over other kinds of blank verse, making these appear as tolerated licence. However convenient the line

Or whére | the górgé|ous Eást | with rích|est hánd

may be as the norm for comparison, it is no better as blank verse than

Shówers on | her kíns | barbár|ick peárl | and góld
or

Of Thám|uz yéar|ly wóund|ed : the | lóve-tále,

and so on. These are other versions of the base which are just as good as the norm in their context.

(6) But the whole conception of *licences* should be banisht from prosody. A rhythm is either good or bad ; if it is good, it is required, not licensed ; and the business of scansion is to account for its form.

§ 17. (1) Scansion should at any rate aim at completeness in its analysis of metre. If, in order to get round difficulty, it brings in anacrusis—the notion that syllables may be loosely *attacht* to the metre—or extra-metrical syllables, it is manifestly failing to do its business ; it is trying to make a verse conform to a base by leaving out an integral portion of the verse. It must be the *metre* that accounts for every syllable of the verse, not something *outside the metre*.

(2) Apart from this, bad or incorrect scansion may fall under three heads :

(i) It analyses metre with regard to the speech-rhythm simply as such. This is really a failure to achieve scansion at all ; for metre is not in the qualities or dispositions of mere speech-rhythm, but in the way they exhibit conformity to an accepted constancy of pattern-rhythm.

Principles of English Prosody

For example, the theory of monopressures proposes to account for metre by arranging the syllables in groups according to their vocalization in single expirations. This gives interesting results, but contributes nothing to the understanding of *metrical* fact ; for these breath-groups, or “monopressures,” are simply concerned with the varying masses of actual sound, and show nothing of how the presence in the mind of a constant pattern causes these varying masses to be disposed as they are heard into a representation of the pattern.

(ii) It refers the speech-rhythm incorrectly to the base, or refers it to the wrong base.

This will only happen when the speech-rhythm is, as modulation, ambiguous, i.e. might represent more than one base ; and should only be possible in detached lines or short passages. For example, standing by itself, the line

Teaching each stop and key
might naturally be thought to scan
Téaching | each stóp | and kéy
as a simple modulation of the base

— ' | — ' | — ' ;

not a very charming verse. But as a matter of fact it scans

Teách|ing éach | stóp | and kéy

on the base

— ' | — ' | — ' | — ' ;

for the whole stanza runs

With bréath | and fín|gers gív|ing life

To the | shríll córn|et and | the fífe,

Téach|ing éach | stóp | and kéy

To thóse | upón | the pípe | that pláy (Drayton);

and spaced out by the hearing into this metre the verse is a very striking and effective one.

(iii) By far the commonest error of scansion is the distortion of speech-rhythm, or the untruthful marking of it, in order to display the base. This not only ruins the metre in every particular case, but violates the essential nature of metre; for the rhythmic variety of spoken words is as essential to metre as conformity to the constant pattern: indeed, it is only as *varieties* of the pattern that lines of verse exist. And this primary condition is ignored if verse is scanned by merely applying to it the scheme of the pattern.

Principles of English Prosody

There should be no need to emphasize such an elementary point ; but mistaken scansion of this kind is continually appearing in the most unexpected places. Such a scansion as

Or dó him míghtier sérvíce ás his thrálls

is stupid enough ; only a very ill-educated person would accentuate “ as,” and only a very coarse sense of rhythm would fail to be disgusted with the murder of the true rhythm :

Or dó him míghtier sérvíce as his thrálls.

But the same book in which this occurs—one of the most recent and most learned treatises on English prosody—also contains such flagrant scansion as this :

Of Thámuz yéarly wóunded : thé love-tále ;

and this is given (for the purpose of justifying strictures on Milton’s technique !) as an instance of “ lines where the short unaccented syllables or unimportant, monosyllabic words must be lengthened beyond their natural quantity in order to fit in with

the rhythm of the verse." Blunt and complicated ignorance of the nature of metre could not be more naively expressed.

(3) Among mistaken forms of scansion we can hardly include those which employ untruthful notation ; those, for example, which use – and ˘ instead of accented and unaccented syllables. For these signs have only to be systematically mistranslated in order to make accurate scansion possible. However, when Furnivall gives as a type of Shakespeare's verse this scansion :

Dārk nīght thāt frōm thē ēye hīs fūnctiōn tākes,

it is shocking to think that anyone could endure to mark the word "dark" as *short* ; moreover, the correct quantitative marking of this foot ("dārk nīght") would when mistranslated into accents have given the right scansion so far ; the foot obviously having a doubled accent ("dārk nīght"). But quantitative correctness in the rest of the line would give no rhythm at all ; for only one of the syllables marked short really is short. Also, "frōm" in this position is right as quantity, but if meant to

Principles of English Prosody

indicate an accent is clearly wrong. So long as the notation is understood never to mean what it ought to mean, it may be serviceable. There will always, however—as in “frōm” above—be the danger of inadvertently using the notation correctly, and thereby falsifying the rhythm.

§ 18. (1) Scansion, it is clear, should be guided by the general, but not quite invariable, principle that Accent makes the Verse and not Verse the Accent.

The principle may not always be at first apparent. Sometimes, for example, accents that seem required merely to make the verse are really required by some special sense of the words. Thus the line

Not to knit my soul to an approved wanton

can best be scanned if “my” has such emphasis as to relegate “soul” to the grade of, at best, a half-accent compared with it; and so, though less noticeably, with “not” and “knit.” But this scansion

Nót to knit | mý soul | to an ap|próved | wánton

is by no means artificial, but gives the very speech-rhythm required by the occasion. (*Much Ado about Nothing*, IV, i.)

(2) But this fixation of rhetorical accent by prosodic form is not always so precise. Indeed, on the principle just given, will follow the corollary, that there is no absolutely correct scansion. Scansion will be correct when it correctly exhibits a particular enunciation ; but it is not certain that any particular enunciation of a verse is necessarily and absolutely the correct one, though it may be certain that another is incorrect. It is, for example, sometimes cited as a reproach, that prosodists cannot agree on the scansion of the first line of *Paradise Lost* ; but the fact is, that there are several ways in which the line may be said as blank verse. It is certain that

Of mán's first dísobédience ánd the frúit

is incorrect, because the verse could not be so spoken ; and just as certainly

Of mán's | fírst | dísobédience | and the frúit

Principles of English Prosody

is incorrect, because, though it exhibits a possible enunciation, the line so spoken would not be spoken as blank verse. A correct scansion would be

Of mán's | first | disobéd|ience and | the frúit :

but this might also be correct :

Of mán's | first dis|obéd|ience and | the frúit ;

for the line may be spoken as blank verse either way.

(3) The difference is slight, and perhaps hardly involves rhetorical accent. When that does come in, scansion may vary more remarkably, while still retaining its invariable method. Thus, in the line

To be or not to be : that is the question,
the obvious scansion

To bé | or nó't | to bé | thát is | the què'stion

is not the only correct one ; for some may prefer to say " To bé ór nó't to be," and this will give blank verse rhythm equally well, if " ór " be spoken as occupying the place of — ' , and " nó't to be " as

occupying a similar place ; and scansion will correctly exhibit this as

To bé | ór | nó't to be | etc.

(4) The sole object of scansion must always be borne in mind ; it is to represent speech-rhythm as conforming to a pattern. Where, as very commonly happens, several scansions of a line are possible, precisely the same function is in each scansion being performed ; it is merely that several speech-rhythms conform to the pattern.

(5) As a general rule, although the foot-division of words is notional, yet where a sense-pause or even the end of a word would clearly give a good foot-division, this should not be ignored ; in other words, feet should not be cut across words unnecessarily, for that would probably not give the truth of the real and natural equivalence by virtue of which metre exists. Thus in the line

Thrones, dominations, pryncedoms, virtues, powers,
there seems very little doubt that the first foot should be the word “ thrones ” : thus

Thrónes, | dominá|tions, etc., (*not* thrónes, dom|inátions) ;

Principles of English Prosody

for “thrones,” as the line is most naturally said, is what occupies the place of the first — of the base. In the same way,

Of mán's | fírst | disobéd|ience and | the frúit,

probably gives the line as it is naturally spoken by most people.

In such cases as these, the scansion is not really ambiguous ; for there is no doubt what pattern the speech-rhythm must conform to. Given a rhythm that does so conform, the business of scansion is clear ; and the fact that a line scans proves it to have been metrically heard. But the fact that very many lines may be metrically spoken in several ways does not belong to scansion ; scansion merely has to exhibit the speech-rhythm natural to the speaker.

(6) Ambiguity, however, does occasionally occur, when it is uncertain what the pattern should be against which the speech-rhythm is to be heard. This may come from a sudden change of metre to which the context supplies no clue ; though if the

change recurs, the metrical intention should eventually assert itself. Thus in Campion's "Harke al you ladies that do sleep" (*Booke of Ayres*, No. XIX), the metrical intention of the fourth and fifth lines of each stanza is by no means unmistakable; in almost every stanza these lines could, like the first three lines and the sixth, be referred to a base of disyllabic feet, and very likely would be so referred on a first reading of the poem. It is only the accumulated effect of several awkward movements recurring in the same place that suggests a mistaken metre; and then one perceives that in each stanza the fourth and fifth lines contain a sharp change from disyllabic to trisyllabic metre, e.g.

Bids you | awake | and pi|tie them | that weep.

You may doe | in the darke

What the day | doth forbid;

Feare not | the dogs | that barke.

(7) More rarely, the metrical intention may fail to assert itself decisively throughout, and a whole poem might be referred to more than one kind of base. An instance is in James Thomson's admir-

Principles of English Prosody

able cycle of lyrics, *Sunday at Hampstead*, viz. No. XII; the poem opens thus :

O mellow moonlight warm
Weave round my love a charm,

which suggests a rising base of this type

— ' | — ' | — ' ;

and the whole of the poem could be read on this base. But in the second stanza, the occurrence of the same strong modulation in two successive lines :

Nightly to leave thee, dear ;
Lovely and pure within

preceded, and followed, by lines similarly but less strikingly modulated

How my heart shrinks with fear . . .
Vast glooms of woe and sin . . .

suggests that these may not be strong modulations of a rising base, but very simple modulations of a falling base, of this type :

' — — | ' — — | ' — —

(a “ catalectic ” base : see § 28). And as soon as

this suggests itself, it is perceived that the whole of the poem could be read on this base. Thus, taking two verses, one most obviously suggesting a rising, and one a falling rhythm, each might be scanned in two ways :

On Rising base :	O méll low moón light wárm	} (1)
„ Falling „	Ó mellow móonlight wárm	
„ Rising „	Níghtly to léave thee, déar	} (2)
„ Falling „	Níghtly to léave thee, déar	

The rising scansion is the natural one for line (1), the falling scansion for line (2). Which is the natural scansion for the whole poem? The matter is not decided by the fact that the quasi-refrain to each stanza is certainly falling :

Watch her, my little one !
Shield her, my darling !

For this rhythm comes in delightfully either as continuing or as contrasting with the rhythm of the rest of the stanza. Probably most readers would decide for a falling rhythm throughout, on account of the attraction exerted on the rest of the poem by the strong actual falling rhythm in most of the second

Principles of English Prosody

stanza ; but the poem is nevertheless a genuine case of metrical ambiguity.* The possibility of this in accentual metres is, of course, one of the disadvantages of the system compared with quantitative verse, where the substantial rhythm of the base is always actually present as a sequence of quantities.

(8) It will be noticed that, in the poem just discussed, some of the lines, when referred to a falling instead of to a rising base, involve a shift of accent in the scansion. But this does not mean a departure from the principle that scansion must only record actual accents. For it is a fact of enunciation (and scansion merely records it) that if one has clearly in mind a pattern of falling rhythm against which to dispose the actual rhythm of the verse, one *says*

Ó mellow móonlight ;

* The Dirge in Act IV, Scene iii., of Darley's *Sylvia* is another instance :

Rising : Stréw ! stréw | ye Máí|dens ! stréw
 Swéet flów|ers and fáírest.

Falling : Stréw ! stréw ye | Máídens ! | stréw
 Swéet flówers and | fáírest.

and if one has in mind a pattern of rising rhythm, one says

O méllow móonlight ;

the accent of “ mellow ” in the first case, and of “ O ” in the second, being deliberately reduced, for the purpose of the verse-rhythm, to half-accents :

Ó méllow móonlight

Ó méllow móonlight

“ moonlight ” being in both cases probably “ móon-light.”

(9) This, then, clearly is a departure, not from the general principles of scansion, but from the principle of the verse-enunciation which scansion has to exhibit—the principle, namely, that accent makes the verse and not verse the accent. Here, without doubt, the requirements of the verse do govern the placing of the accent. And this happens not infrequently, though always as an exception ; and it is never a case of bringing in a wholly unnatural accent, but simply of the slight enforcement or reduction of a real accentual emphasis. It is done, in fact, so easily and naturally, that most people

Principles of English Prosody

would hardly be aware of doing it unless it were pointed out to them. It is no more than the instinctive procuring of metrical definition by allowing a strong context of rhythm or a characteristic base-rhythm to assert itself over a neutral passage. Thus, in Shelley's *Arethusa*, the line

O sáve me | O guíde me

is followed by the line

And lét the | deep híde me,

correctly so scanned ; for the line will certainly be *spoken* with a slight forcing of the normal accent on " let " and reduction of the accent on " deep," in order to maintain the repetition of the foot — — ' — (called by Bridges the " britannic.")

(10) This artificial or metrical accent is not so much a licence as an extreme case of the rhythmic condition which we call metre ; and in the line just quoted it should be noted that the accentuation which metrical exigence imposes does admirably suit the imploring tone of the words, although it is somewhat exaggerated. This is simply due to the

fact that, in metre, the rhythm is heard against the standard of the ideal pattern ; and where the actual rhythm is a more or less indeterminate possibility of the pattern-rhythm, but may, without violation of natural enunciation, but by an easy emphasis, be made its manifest representative, the very act of insensibly referring the words to the base will attract them into clear conformity.

On the whole, however, the reduction or slurring of natural accents in the interests of metrical definition is the more noticeable phenomenon in English verse ; and the ease with which it occurs may be almost considered a peculiarity of our prosody, though scarcely a desirable one. Its frequency and probable origin are referred to in Part II, § 21 (11, c). It is to be remarked that the practice, however common, is not to be elevated into a principle ; but this is done when it is asserted that two accents should not (and even cannot) occur in one foot, apparent cases of this being explained as metrical slurring of accent. This doctrine is based on the notion that, since accents require inequality, consecutive accents are impossible, the

Principles of English Prosody

sequence levelling them to an equality : a notion often postulated, but seldom elaborated, the absurdity of it being very near the surface. Syllables are accepted as accentuated precisely as, in quantitative verse, syllables are accepted as long : not by comparison with their immediate neighbours, but by comparison with a general sense of syllabic value ; and there is no more difficulty about consecutive accents than about consecutive long syllables. In verse of disyllabic feet (e.g. blank verse) the foot $\underline{\quad}' \underline{\quad}'$ is frequent and unmistakable ; metrical definition need seldom invoke a slurred natural accent. But in verse of trisyllabic or polysyllabic feet, two accents in a foot certainly do tend towards disintegration, since the ear will always prefer to simplify the elements of rhythm ; and so feet like

$\underline{\quad}' \underline{\quad} \underline{\quad}' , \underline{\quad} \underline{\quad}' \underline{\quad}' , \underline{\quad}' \underline{\quad} \underline{\quad}' \underline{\quad}$

would be likely to break down into

$\underline{\quad}' \underline{\quad} | \underline{\quad}' , \underline{\quad} \underline{\quad}' | \underline{\quad}' , \underline{\quad}' \underline{\quad} | \underline{\quad}' \underline{\quad} ;$

or, if the base were to assert itself, there would be some slurring of natural accent. But even in trisyllabic

The Elements

§ 18 (11)

metres, feet with two accents certainly occur. The following is a clear instance :

After so many concurring petitions
From all ages and sexes, and all conditions,
We come in the rear to present our follies
To Pym, Stroude, Haslerig, Hampden and Holles.
(Denham).

There is no doubt that each line represents a base of four feet ; but there is also no doubt that in the last line the five proper names are to be spoken with five equally noticeable accents, and that, so spoken, the line has no difficulty at all in being a line of four feet. One of the feet therefore has two accents :

To Pým, | Stróude, Háslé|rig, Hámpden, | and Hólles.

But in the second line, “ all ” may be considered neutral as regards its natural accent, and it gives an exact instance of the way metre can now reduce, now enforce, the accent of speech :

From all ág|es and séx|es and áll | condítions.

(11) In just the same way, syllables which common speech makes coalesce into one will be separated,

Principles of English Prosody

if that is required in order properly to space the line out against, and occupy the room of, its base : thus, everyone (except an actor) would say

Your mind is tossing on the ocean

since the line occurs in blank verse context and cannot fall in with the context unless so spoken. But as this is an artificial tampering with speech and is avoidable, it is seldom resorted to by poets who have developed into full command of metre.

(12) An analogous case of modifying speech for the sake of metre, which, however, is not a defect, but an extremely subtle refinement of rhythmic expression, is the prolongation of syllables in order to obtain the full spacing of the pattern. Thus the lines (Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound* : Act I),

Ah, sister, desolation is a delicate thing :

It walks not on the earth, it floats not on the air,

would, quoted apart from their context, seem to be six-foot lines ; but actually they are seven-foot lines, and must be so spoken and scanned. (For the importance of the different length, see § 27 ; and for

further discussion of the lengthening involved, § 19 (17)).

(13) Except for this last case, which has apparently been found somewhat severely to tax the rhythmic sense, these modifications of speech-rhythm in the interest of metre are effected quite instinctively, and by no means as difficult artifices ; and the fact that this is so, although in the whole mass of metrical phenomena they are exceptional, shows that it is natural to hear rhythm metrically wherever this is possible, i.e. to hear it as occupying the room of an ideal pattern and as containing elements of equivalent force : and, if necessary, on occasion slightly to modify speech so as to do this. But such metrical interferences with speech must not be confused with those cases in which an anomalous actual speech-rhythm is merely taken over by metre. The best-known instance is the phenomenon called Recession of Accent, which, once common, has now almost died out, unless remote dialects preserve it. This was a tendency (how far binding in ordinary speech it is now difficult to say) to the following effect : When a disyllable (or sometimes a juncture of two

Principles of English Prosody

monosyllables) is accented on the last syllable, this accent is thrown back to the previous syllable if the word is immediately followed, in close grammatical connection, by an accented syllable. Thus "complète" becomes "cómplete" in phrases like "cómplete ármour," "cómplete májesty," "cómplete stéel":

Than all the cómplete ármour that thou wearest.

(*Richard III.*)

A maid of grace and cómplete májesty. (*L. L. L.*)

She that hath that is clad in cómplete stéel. (*Comus.*)

Bridges also most appositely quotes from Milton's Tetrachordon sonnet:

Thy age like ours, O soul of Sír John Chéek.

But a host of examples could be collected from Shakespeare and the dramatists and Milton's earlier poems. Milton, however, definitely abandoned in his later poems the facility given by Recession of Accent, and its use seems decidedly commoner in the early than in the late Shakespeare; from which we may conclude that the habit was dying out of speech during Shakespeare's lifetime, and was no

longer noticeable when Milton was composing *Paradise Lost*; for by then he could no longer rely on it clearly to assert the rhythm he intended. But we still commonly say, for example, “unknown,” and yet, “the unknown god”; though the recession no doubt survives in such a phrase because compound words like “unknown”* have not their accents rigidly prescribed, but may vary it with their context. The question is complicated by the fact that a possible blank verse rhythm would always result if recession of accent were ignored; guidance must be sought in the poet’s habitual practice when the line to be decided on was written. But there seems no doubt that recession of accent was at one time customary in spoken English; and when that was so, was imported into versification. Its use—e.g. in Shelley—subsequent to its natural occurrence in speech, is of course a metrical artifice; seldom employed since Milton’s mature verse has taught us to expect and to delight in the modulation which it unnecessarily avoids—a modulation which,

* Compound in *meaning*, that is: not of course compound merely as regards etymological form, like “compound” itself.

Principles of English Prosody

of course, is common enough even in the earliest Elizabethan verse, when its foot-division (— — | — ' —') falls *between* words, e.g. "and the | gréen córn "; just as Milton in *Comus* no doubt intends "in cóm|plete stéel," but also has "to a | fól déath."

(14) Something similar to the Recession of Accent, and needing here no more than the bare mention of it, is the occurrence in verse—not as merely metrical accents, but as surviving speech-accents—of such words as "sérviceáble," "revénue," "re-tínue," "edíct," "captíve" and the like.

The classic discussion of this and of Recession of Accent, as far as prosody is concerned, is in Bridges' *Milton's Prosody*; the above is merely a cursory statement of his results, which everyone nowadays must accept. Such questions, however, do not strictly belong to the theory of prosody, but to the phonetic history of English primarily, and thence to the historical criticism of prosody.

§ 19. *Time-values in Accentual Verse.*

(1) So far the nature of verse has been discussed without explicit reference to the measurement of verse *in time*, though this is often held to be absolutely essential. But an alternative to that

measurement has throughout been implied, and must now be more formally given ; and thereby, in a more precise enunciation, the primary condition of metrical rhythm.

It will be convenient to consider, first, verse of the foot-accent type (" Rimed-accentual," § 8 (2) iii). Alliterative-accentual and quantitative verse may then, in this respect, be compared with it, and the nature of their time-values thus elicited. The relationship of Modulation and Base, and the way this comes to be felt in the hearing of verse, will be taken as *establisht*.

(2) If it is right that the characterizing element in English verse-rhythm is accent—and it seems hardly possible to doubt this—then clearly the sense of time is used in the service of rhythm not to perceive this characterizing element, but to distribute it. Since, therefore, this kind of verse does not merely consist of a certain number of accents, but also of those accents in a certain disposition, the effect of rhythm is in an important respect dependent on the time-values of its utterance ; namely, in respect of the intervals at which the accents come.

Principles of English Prosody

But when time-values are thus asserted to be necessary to accentual rhythm, there is no need to understand from this that accentual rhythm is *measured* in time—i.e. consists in a certain duration of utterance, or of accents embedded in a certain duration. Nothing more is meant so far than that the sense of time has a part in the recognition of accentual rhythms by enabling us to recognize the intervals of the scheme in which the accents are disposed. But to recognize the intervals as a scheme need imply no recognition of measurement of the intervals; one simply has to recognize a certain disposition of the accents among the non-accents, and the sense of time—of succession—of course gives this; but it need not be expected to give any recognition of the duration of the intervals, either relative to one another, or in their total effect. In a word, nothing need be demanded of the sense of time in accentual rhythms but perception of the *order* in which accents and non-accents occur.

(3) Consider, for example, the norm of blank verse, for which we have chosen

Or whére | the górlgeous Eást | with rích|est hánd.

Of this it might truly be asserted that the duration of each foot is the same ; and it might plausibly be asserted that the duration of the whole line is the normal duration of a blank verse. But neither of these assertions is necessary ; that is to say, the line fulfils the conditions of blank verse rhythm independently of them both : it does so merely as a certain order, or succession, of accents and non-accents. If that be the case, it should be possible to find lines just as certainly in blank verse rhythm which will not agree with these assertions ; thus showing them to be not merely unnecessary but untrue of blank verse in general. This is easily tested by carefully attending to any well-modulated passage of blank verse ; but we may confine ourselves to a single unmistakable instance. Consider, first as regards the equal duration of feet within the line, this verse :

And máde | him bów | to the | góds of | his wíves.

The line merely has to be said in order to make it plain that its rhythm requires no equality of duration between the accented feet and the foot

Principles of English Prosody

in which accent is suspended. Its rhythm is simply accepted as giving a whole movement equivalent to the movement of the lines round it ; it is an equivalent succession of syllables, with an equivalent distribution of accents.

(4) But just what does this equivalence of movement mean ? Does it imply an equivalence in duration of whole line to whole line ? If that were so, then in order to compensate for the unusual rapidity of the third foot, one or all of the other feet would have to be unusually long : longer, that is to say, than the feet of the norm

Or whére | the gó[r]geous Eást | with rích|est hánd,

which this hypothesis must presume equal to one another, as they probably are.

Now, of course, it is possible to say

And made him bow to the gods of his wives

with such compensatory prolongation that the whole line would roughly be equal in duration to

Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand ;

but the recognition of both these lines as belonging to blank verse rhythm does not in the very least depend on this. It is simply the recognition of a certain kind of accentual order. Duration of utterance, in fact, has nothing whatever to do with the equivalence of accentual rhythms. And, indeed, it is obvious that the pace of verse may vary infinitely without affecting the rhythm of the verse. A line which took two seconds to say would be just as recognizably *blank verse* as a line which took one second.

(5) But we are not to take verse-rhythms simply as speech-rhythms in their own quality, but as speech-rhythms referred to an ideal standard. Perhaps time-values may come in here. But it must be in a somewhat abstract manner. For, first, as regards the reference of individual verse-feet to the corresponding feet of the pattern : the reference cannot be based on equal duration, for (taking blank verse as our instance again) all the feet in the pattern are equal to one another, but as we have just seen the feet in the verse are not necessarily equal to one another ; and therefore the feet

Principles of English Prosody

of the verse are not necessarily equal in duration to the feet of the pattern. If, therefore, reference of verse to base does imply recognition of an equal duration, this must evidently be in the duration of whole lines. But again it has just been shown that lines of the same kind of verse need not occupy the same time. And, indeed, it is obvious enough that no one thinks of reading blank verse so as to maintain an equal duration for each line. The pace of verse not only may vary within the line, but has no need to adjust these variations into a general uniformity of pace ; setting whole line against whole line, there is just as much liberty for variation from line to line.

(6) If, then, when a verse is referred to its base, the equivalence which makes it metre is supposed to consist in an equivalence of duration, it must be supposed that the ideal standard of time-values is continually being altered to suit the pace of actual enunciation. It must be supposed, for instance, that when the pace of blank verse is increased, the ideal standard of duration against which it is to be measured is unconsciously and

simultaneously lessened in exact correspondence. But an ideal standard which thus accommodates itself to the variable actuality it is supposed to standardize is evidently useless ; and an ideal duration of this precise and limitless elasticity, responding to the immediate conditions as nicely as the actual sound does, seems to be not merely useless but meaningless.

(7) To sum up : the whole notion of a fixt duration—whether the verses be measured against each other or against a standard pattern—is not only not required in order to understand accentual metre, but is alien to its nature. If part of a verse goes unusually quick it does not follow that there must be compensation for this by making the rest of it go unusually slow, in order to fill up a certain standard measure of duration. A certain standard order of succession must be satisfied : that is the part played by the sense of time in understanding accentual rhythms. The introduction of duration into accentual-prosody seems to be due to a desire to capture in definable terms the somewhat elusive fact of equivalence, which is the essential fact in the existence of accentual rhythm as metre.

Principles of English Prosody

But metrical equivalence is an even simpler thing than equivalence of duration, though much more difficult to state precisely.

(8) The instance was given, in § 18 (2), of the first line of *Paradise Lost* as a line which could easily be heard unmetrically, thus :

Of mán's | first | disobédience | and the frúit.

A metrical hearing of the line would, in our notation, be represented thus :

Of mán's | first | disobéd|ience and | the frúit.

But what exactly is the actual difference which is thus represented? It is no paradox to say, the actual difference does not lie in the hearing of the actual speech-sounds ; the difference between the first and the second notation of the line is, that in the first the actual speech-rhythm is heard simply as such, but in the second it is heard not only as actual sound, but also as conforming to the ideal blank verse pattern—the base. When a person capable of so hearing the line speaks it, no doubt this will slightly affect his enunciation of it ; but the effect

might not be perceptible at all to a person incapable of referring the actual sound he hears to an ideal metrical pattern.* In a word, the second or metrical notation of the line does not simply represent the hearing of the line, but also the way the hearing of it is understood ; or, to put it roughly, the first stands for a mere *sensation* of rhythm, the second for a *perception* of metre. Of course, rhythm is not really mere sensation ; but the difference between mere rhythm and metre has an exact analogy in the difference between sensation and perception.

Some might prefer to call it, not merely in analogy, but actually, a difference between perception and apperception ; the “ apperception mass ” being the whole previous experience of blank verse *plus* its continual idealization into the standard pattern. The objection to this would be, first, the questionable meaning of the word “ apperception ” ; and secondly, the doubt whether, in the sense intended, there

* i.e. to a pattern capable of standardizing a large variety of rhythmic phrases and, in so doing, of combining them into rhythmic sentences which can represent it : a reference which obviously goes much further and deeper than the mere *recognition* (in prose) of rhythmic phrases as direct instances of this or that familiar type. See § 12 (3).

Principles of English Prosody

is an intelligible difference between perception and apperception. But though sensation, as opposed to perception, may be a fiction, the distinction between sensation and perception is at least intelligible ; and to assert its analogy with the distinction between rhythm and metre is perhaps to give as precise an indication of this latter as may be.

(9) Now it would be very convenient if we could say that the difference between

and disobédience | and the fruit
 disobéd|ience and | the fruit

was simply in duration of utterance. It may be that the second notation does represent a slight prolonging of enunciation, but this is not certain ; and if it is so, it is not in order to fill up a standard duration, but merely to enforce the reference to the base. This may seem to be hair-splitting ; but the point is a real one, and important. For take the line

Burnt after them to the bottomless pit ;

no tolerable enunciation of this could ever make it equivalent in duration to such a line as

Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens ; and shades of death.

Yet a metrical enunciation of

Búrnt áf|ter them | to the | bóttom|less pít

very likely does require the syllables in the unaccented feet to be slightly prolonged ; not in the least in the hope of attaining to a certain duration as such—to a duration, namely, which will also accommodate

Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens ; and shades of death—

but simply, as before, to enforce reference to the base, to emphasize the qualitative perception of the rhythm as metre.

(10) Qualitative perception : that is the real point. The perception of accentual metre is essentially qualitative, even when it is furthered by quantity. Accentual metre is given by quality of accentual succession ; it does not consist in quantitative succession, though that may be of service to it. When the verse-foot — — is substituted for the base-foot — ' , it is not because — — is equivalent to — ' in time, but because the substitution of — — will give an equivalent quality of succession.

Principles of English Prosody

(11) When blank verse was first written (e.g. *Gorboduc*), it conformed throughout as closely as possible with its pattern. This was monotonous and inexpressive ; and it was soon found that the accent could sometimes be suspended in a foot without breaking the quality of the whole rhythm. This was felt as a modulation of the pattern ; there was still every element of the pattern represented in the verse, but not every element reproduced. So with feet of inverted accent, of single syllables, and the other substitutions. The art of blank verse, in fact, really began with all this (i.e. with Marlowe's use of it) : namely, blank verse as a truly expressive instrument. For it now began to be possible to refer all sorts of varying rhythms to one unvarying pattern ; until, in the course of no very long development, such a line as

Is goads, thorns, nettles, tails of wasps
or as

Look where he goes even now, out at the portal

could, in a context of blank verse, without any difficulty at all, assume the quality of blank verse

metre. For these lines, heard metrically, are heard against the continual consciousness of the pattern or base ; *not* as in conflict with this, but with reference to it, as a quality of rhythmic succession possibly equivalent to it ; and judged to be actually equivalent when the words are not merely heard as rhythm but, by virtue of this reference to the base, *perceived* as metre in the form our notation gives as

Is góads | thórns | néttles | taíls | of wásp

and

Lóok where he | góes even | nów, | óut at the | pórtal ;

in which every element of the base is represented in the verse.

(12) This perception (by referring a rhythm as it is heard to the consciousness of a base or constant pattern) of an equivalent quality of succession, is what has previously been alluded to, somewhat loosely, as the spacing out of verse accents in conformity with the base. This was merely to avoid the appearance of bringing in the notion of equivalent duration, or measurement in time. But whatever words be used for it, the essential thing in modern

Principles of English Prosody

accentual verse as far as time is concerned is the kind of accentual distribution in it. Accentual verse as a whole is to be divided into two sections. What was previously called alliterative would be better called verse of Undistributed Accent ; it is merely the numeration of accent that characterizes this, the manner of its distribution being immaterial. But in verse of Distributed Accent—modern rimed verse or blank verse—the base has not only definite numeration but specific distribution of accent ; and this latter is a character so strong that the numeration need not be always retained so long as there is equivalent distribution of the accents actually present.

(13) Once the principle is clearly grasped, that in all Verse of Distributed Accent the sound is not only heard, but is simultaneously perceived as representing the base, being instinctively “ spaced out ” in the mind so as to provide for each foot of the base a true exponent in the movement of the words : once this principle is grasped, scansion can become real and vital, instead of being factitious and mechanical, a mere splitting up of lines into

prescribed divisions. For though it be true that feet are properly only notional in the verse (§ 16), yet that which verse-feet as a notation indicate is real enough ; and a real scansion will be that which exhibits the most natural grouping of the words which can provide a series of true exponents of the base-feet. The tendency in verse is always to dispose actual rhythm into metrical shape ; and scansion must therefore make the natural divisions coincide with foot-division wherever possible, in order to show the real equivalence of sound to pattern. A real scansion, for example, will have no difficulty in making a single emphatic syllable into a foot ; for it is matter of fact that one of the commonest things in blank verse is to have a strong monosyllable standing clearly as the representative of a whole base-foot. Thus in the very first line of *Paradise Lost* there is a monosyllabic foot so obvious that scansion, one would think, can only wilfully obscure it :

Of mán's | first | disobéd|ience and | the fruít.

And in the line quoted above

Lóok where he | góes even | nów | óut at the | pórtal

Principles of English Prosody

to preserve the obvious monosyllabic foot is also to preserve the natural movement of the line in trisyllabic groups ; and it is this natural movement that is heard metrically—the actual grouping of the speech-rhythm is what the mind perceives as the exponent of the pattern ; how this is perceived is for scansion to show. The scansion which some might prefer on the wholly illusory ground of superior formality :

Lóok where | he góes | even nów | óút at | the pórtal

is possible only in the sense that it is possible so to understand the rhythm, though surely with complete loss of the line's actual character as spoken and heard.

(14) On the other hand, there is of course no difficulty whatever in dividing the verse-feet so as to cut across words ; for the abstract continuity of the pattern, always present in the mind, will always make it easy for metrical perception so to dispose the rhythm. Thus in the line

Thrónes, | dominá|tions, prínce|doms, vír|tues, pówers

the great word “ thrones ” unmistakably forms the

The Elements

§ 19 (15)

first foot by itself ; but it seems also unmistakable that the last syllable of “ dominations ” must be assigned in a metrical distribution to the third foot, from which follows a sequence of foot-divisions cutting across the words.

(15) The true understanding of metrical perception further makes quite unnecessary, and indeed, shows up as untrue, the distinction sometimes made between “ syllabic ” verse and accentual verse ; the first supposed to be based on counting syllables, the second on counting accents. It is true that some poets habitually try to maintain a uniform number of syllables in lines of the same metre ; though they usually have to resort pretty soon to such fictions as spelling “ favourable ” “ fav’rable ” —as though words consisted of letters, and would be altered by altering the letters. But this is a mere idiosyncrasy. The blank verse of *Paradise Lost* (which is supposed to be syllabic) and the blank verse of *The Winter’s Tale* are composed on identical principles. Both refer a great variety of speech-rhythms to the same base ; the difference is simply in the kind of speech-rhythms preferred by the two

Principles of English Prosody

poets. Milton always chooses such rhythms that a syllable strong enough to stand for two base-elements ($\text{ ' } = \text{ ' }$) will always be accompanied somewhere in the same line by two syllables light enough to stand for one base-element ($= \text{ ' } = \text{ ' }$); Shakespeare requires no such compensation, but is satisfied by equivalence foot by foot. In both, the manner of referring the rhythms they choose to the base is precisely the same.

Whether the verse of *Paradise Lost* really is "syllabic" may be questioned. The elisions which are supposed to account for the supernumerary syllables can hardly be taken as omissions, but only as rapid pronunciation. But once admit supernumerary syllables at all, however rapid they may be, and the "syllabic" system breaks down. The rest of Milton's verse is not of course "syllabic"; it admits the "britannic" foot ($= \text{ ' } =$) at the end of lines and at sense-pauses within the line.

The word "syllabic" is elsewhere in this treatise used in quite another sense (§ 3), as the name for the non-rhythmic qualities of verbal sound.

(16) We have, then, discriminated the part played by time-values in modern accentual verse—verse of Distributed Accent—to the following effect:

a sense of duration has no part in the scheme of it, but a sense of succession is absolutely required, and in a double degree ; first, for the succession which gives rhythm as actually heard, and second, for the disposition of the hearing of this in accordance with a pattern, so that the actually variable distribution of accent will always be perceived as the exponent of an ideally fixt distribution. This is easily seen to come midway between the other two kinds of versification which this treatise discusses. For in alliterative verse—or verse of Undistributed Accent—the absence of duration is obvious, and the sense of succession only enters in the first degree, as the succession which gives the rhythm actually heard ; there is no further distribution of this by the sense of succession into perception of conformity with a standard distribution. On the other hand, Quantitative Verse not only employs the sense of succession in the double degree required by verse of Distributed Accent, but employs the sense of duration as well. Exactly how it was employed in Latin and Greek verse is disputable, since we do not know what Latin and Greek verse sounded like.

Principles of English Prosody

But the duration can hardly have amounted to the rigid time of musical rhythm ; except when the verse was sung, when no doubt, as always, the music would impose its rigidity on the fluctuating verse. It is hardly credible, however, that hexameters or iambics were always spoken at a uniform pace ; hardly credible that the variations could properly be considered even as “ rubato ”—for a time that is all “ rubato ” is not really even that. But through all the variations of pace there was always the fixt *relative* duration of syllables—their “ quantities ” in the strictly technical sense ; so that however the sense might urge on the pace of the verse or hold it back, within the pace of the moment the relative equivalence (e.g. $\frac{\text{Long}}{2} = \text{Short}$) was always maintained. But whether the relative duration of syllables was actually heard—maintained in the speaking of the verse ; or whether it was only understood—a relativity perceived somewhat as the pattern is in accentual verse : this remains uncertain. Quantitative experiments in English have not gone far enough to make the decision of this much clearer ;

but possibly their suggestion inclines to the latter alternative.

(17) Duration, as has been said, may sometimes enter into accentual verse, not as a schematic element, but as an aid to the sense of succession which gives perception of a modulated pattern. A monosyllabic foot is an instance of this ; but an instance so simple as a rule that our ordinary notation sufficiently indicates it. But sometimes the duration of a syllable required by metrical succession extends beyond the foot in which its accent occurs ; and sometimes, usually involving this last case, a whole line is extended so as appreciably to represent a base of more numerous accentuation than the actual verse (see § 18 (12)). For such exceptional cases it will be desirable to have a notation capable of exhibiting the distribution not merely of accentuation but of duration also. We may adopt for this the notation of music ; but with the strict proviso that its sense is to be so limited as to preclude any indication of rigid musical time. The notes merely indicate the succession of syllables without regard to duration, except when the metrical

Principles of English Prosody

succession requires a duration distributed over more than one foot ; and the musical convention will be used to show where this extended duration occurs.

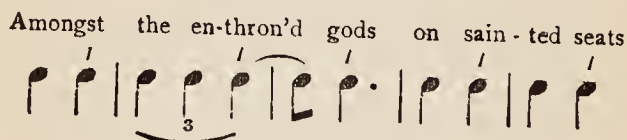
Thus the line

Amóngst | the enthron'd | góds | on sain|ted séats

is not, as this scansion gives it, quite fairly exhibited. There can be no doubt that " gods " is a monosyllabic foot ; but also there can be very little doubt that this foot contains not only " gods," but also an extension of "-thron'd" ; for these two syllables, as this scansion fails to show, are clearly equalized in duration in the interests of their equal metrical emphasis. But if we represent the blank verse base as follows :



we can easily give the following true scansion of the line :



The Elements

§ 19 (17)

For other analogous uses of this scansion, so long as it is accepted as limited to exhibiting the distribution of duration, without a strict quantitative interpretation, compare the following blank verse lines :

What blood - y man is that ? He can re - port



Being lass - lorn : thy pole - clipt vine-yards



In nes - cient - ness, in nes - cient - ness



In a lit - tle joy, in a lit - tle joy



Principles of English Prosody

The last two instances (from Francis Thompson's *Anthem of Earth*) thus showing the blank verse metre split in two, somewhat in the manner of the classical pentameter ($2\frac{1}{2} + 2\frac{1}{2} = 5$).

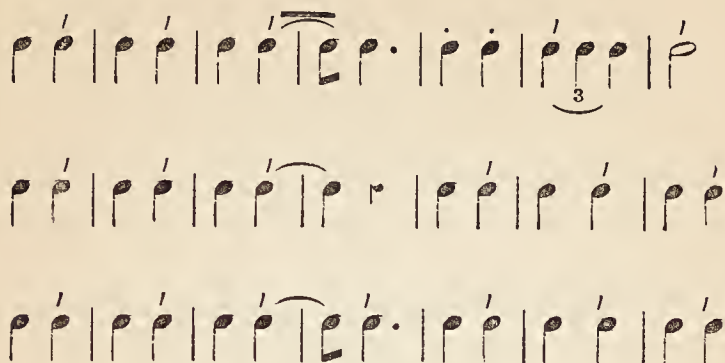
The celebrated passage from Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* was alluded to in § 18 (12) as giving an instance of the deliberate prolongation of the whole verse in order to distribute it recognizably against the base. The norm of the passage may be taken to be

And wáke | and find | the shád|ow Páin | as hé | whom nów |
we gréet.

The problem is to scan in accordance with this such lines as these :

Ah sister ! Desolation is a delicate thing ;
It walks not on the earth, it floats not on the air,
But treads with silent footstep, and fans with silent
wing. . . .

As soon as we have a notation which enables us to show clearly duration extending beyond the foot in which the accent occurs, the problem becomes a simple one :



The recurrence of the “stressed pause”* in the same position will be noticed. These instances will suffice to show the occasional usefulness of a notation which can convey duration-values even in accentual metres.

Musical scansion is, of course, nothing new. It has sometimes had an odd theoretical result. It is a convention in music that the bar should begin with an accent. The possibility of using musical notation for verse has suggested

* The term, of course, is a loose one. It may either be “empty”—a real pause in the sound; or it may contain a prolongation of sound. We may occasionally find it useful to indicate a “stressed pause” by the mark \vee : thus “foot \vee step”—“Desola \vee tion.”

Principles of English Prosody

the headlong conclusion that the foot must also begin with an accent. This obviously leaves a large number of verses with a syllable unaccounted for outside the metre. Of course there is no real analogy between the foot in verse and the bar in music ; and as the foot consists of the natural attachment of non-accent to accent, rising feet are plainly required.

Some musical theorists have postulated that the blank verse foot — ['] — is to be given not as ♩ ♩ but as ♩ ♩ or ♩ ♩ . This is too shocking to common sense and simple experience to need refutation.

Works by
Compton Mackenzie



The Passionate Elopement, 7s. 6d.

Carnival, 7s. 6d.

Sinister Street, Vol. I, 7s. 6d.

Sinister Street, Vol. II, 7s. 6d.

Guy and Pauline, 7s. 6d.

Sylvia Scarlett, 8s.

Sylvia and Michael, 8s.

Poor Relations, 7s. 6d.

Rich Relatives, 9s.

The Seven Ages of Woman, 7s. 6d.

Kensington Rhymes, 5s.

Martin Secker

Works by
Maurice Baring



Dead Letters, 6s.

Diminutive Dramas, 5s.

Poems ; 1914-1919, 6s.

Passing By, 7s. 6d.

Martin Secker

Works by
Norman Douglas



South Wind, 7s. 6d.

Old Calabria, 1os. 6d.

Fountains in the Sand, 6s.

Siren Land, 7s. 6d.

Martin Secker

Works by
D. H. Lawrence



The Lost Girl, 9s.

Women in Love, 9s.

Aaron's Rod, 7s. 6d.

The Ladybird, 7s. 6d.

New Poems, 5s.

Sea and Sardinia, 21s.

Martin Secker

Date Due

~~OCT 28 1975~~

1976

NOV 10 1989

PRINTED IN U. S. A.



CAT. NO. 23233

PE 1505 .A2

Abercrombie, Lascelles, 1
Principles of English prosody.

v.1
010101 000



0 1163 0235078 4
TRENT UNIVERSITY

PE1505 .A2 v.1

Abercrombie, Lascelles

Principles of English prosody.

DATE

ISSUED TO

22148

22148

